



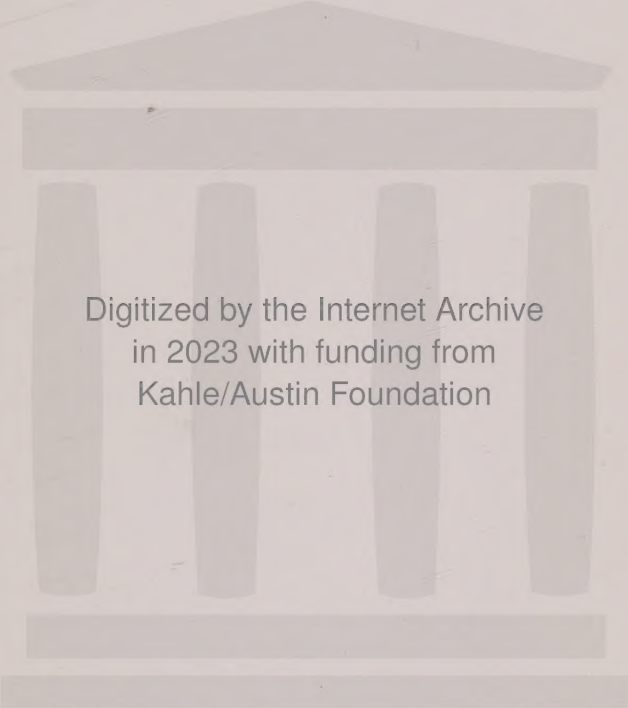
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PRIX BRENTANO

An annual award of twenty-five thousand francs, founded in 1928 by Messrs. Brentano. The Prize aims to encourage Franco-American cultural relations by bringing to the American public in translation each year a book which will illustrate eminently the French cultural ideal.

COMMITTEE OF HONOR

PAUL CLAUDEL

(French Ambassador to the U. S.)

MYRON T. HERRICK

(Late U. S. Ambassador to France)

GEORGE MOORE

JURY

(1928-1929)

MALCOLM COWLEY

LEWIS GALANTIÈRE

JACQUES LE CLERCQ

(Chairman)

HILL OF DESTINY

Prix Brentano—1928-1929

JEAN GIONO

HILL OF DESTINY

INTRODUCTION & TRANSLATION BY JACQUES LE CLERCQ



NEW YORK

BRENTANO'S • PUBLISHERS

MCMXXIX

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

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INTRODUCTION

IN France, the literary prize is a flourishing institution. We need not, indeed, go back to the remote day when one provincial academy crowned the maiden efforts of an obscure engraver's apprentice named Rousseau, while another considered the *Reflections on Human Happiness*, by an equally obscure lieutenant of artillery named Bonaparte, as being "quite without interest." Our own day provides countless examples of the uses and abuses of prize-giving.

Even before the War, it was said maliciously that one author constitutes a literary doctrine, two a school of letters, three a publishing-firm, four an academy and five—five prize-winners! Since these cogent words were uttered, literary competi-

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tions have multiplied exceedingly. Was it not five years ago that a certain sorry sportsman created a prize in memory of one of the glories of French literature, and, in spite of a jury composed of contemporary celebrities, awarded the prize to himself? And was not a jury of humorists at once composed to award a prize of heaven only knows how many million marks (*paper*) to the same sorry sportsman for having written the worst book of the year? Alas, there is perhaps more than a mere jest in the story of the foreigner who, reading *Prix 12 francs* on the cover of a novel, believed its author unworthy of the prize.

Why, then, a new prize?

The significance of the *Prix Brentano* was at once emphasized by the excited response it inspired. At the outset, M. Paul Claudel, Ambassador of France and himself an eminent man of letters, consented to lend it the high authority of his

name; the late Ambassador of the United States in Paris, Mr. Myron T. Herrick, welcomed in the project a further means of encouraging that amity between France and America which he had ever served with such unfailing ardor; and Mr. George Moore, the British novelist, applauded the idea. Immediately, the French press, editors, publishers and writers gave themselves whole-heartedly to the scheme; and the announcement of the first annual award met with a general and sincere enthusiasm.



For the French public, the *Prix Brentano* owes its importance to various novel features. To begin with, it is the first American foundation to crown

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a French work and to insure the publication of that work in America. The mere fact that it comes from abroad—“*l'étranger, cette postérité contemporaine*”—aroused a lively interest; again, the fact that the jury was composed of foreigners gave ample assurance that there could be no *propagande de chapelle* here, no manoeuvres of cliques such as must necessarily attend French prize-awards. Finally the material value of the prize itself proved of good augur.¹

The obvious disadvantages of such a prize lie in the impossibility of awarding it to more than a single author; and it were foolhardy to pretend that the work crowned is necessarily “the best book of the year.” There are too many “best books.”

¹ *The chief literary prizes available in France are in the order of their value: The Nobel Prize, the Prix Brentano, the Prix Lasserre, the Prix Beaumarchais, the Grand Prix de Littérature of the French Academy, the Prix Balzac, the Prix de la Renaissance, the Prix du Roman of the French Academy, the Prix de la Société des Gens de Lettres, the Prix Goncourt, the Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse, the Prix Bookman, etc.*

The donors and the jury would prefer to state that in Jean Giono they have found an author of a unique, arresting talent, and in *Hill of Destiny* a French work embodying such noble qualities of force and beauty as richly to merit consecration by the prize award. It is fitting, too, that the prize should have gone to a book redolent of the French earth, a book rich with the sights and sounds—and silences—of peasant life.

We do not believe, as one naïf journal suggests, that *Hill of Destiny* can possibly present French manners to foreign readers in an unfavorable light; we do not believe, by the same token, that the book contains anything to offend even the most squeamish; but we do believe, with the gazette *Monde*, that “occasionally a jury does manage to award a prize intelligently,” though we hasten to protest that it was not “by accident.”

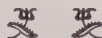


INTRODUCTION

Jean Giono was born in Manosque, in the department of the Basses-Alpes, a town of some five thousand inhabitants, situated on an affluent of the River Durance and nestling in the shadow of the hills that provide the background for the present book. He is thirty years old, and by profession a bank-clerk in his native town. His first literary efforts were printed in *La Criée*, a small periodical published by a friend, a pharmacist, in Marseille. They passed virtually unnoticed. Shortly after, Giono met Lucien Jacques, the artist, who published a collection of poems in prose, *Accompagné de la Flûte*. The discovery of Giono—the circumstance deserves to be established once and for all—redounds to the credit of M. Jean Guéhenno, who edits a collection published by Bernard Grasset in Paris. At M. Guéhenno's instigation, Giono set to work on a book describing the life about him; fragments were printed in the review

Commerce, meeting with praise from André Gide and Paul Valéry; the volume appeared for the first time in the collection *Les Cahiers Verts* directed by M. Daniel Halévy and published by Grasset.

Hill of Destiny is the initial volume of a Trilogy of Earth; already the second panel, *Un de Baumugnes*, is appearing serially in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*; the author is even now finishing the third, *Vents de Printemps*.



Jean Giono has himself described the purport of his book:

“Haute-Provence: an endless waste of blue earth, village after village lying in death on the

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lavender table-land. A handful of men, how pitifully few, how ineffectual! And, crouching amid the grasses, wallowing in the reeds—the hill, like a bull.

Already it utters a muffled roar. Tomorrow it will wrench its limbs of granite free of its bed, and, bearing its burden of olive-groves, of pine woods and human lives, bound across the reaches of the sky.

Then, when at last the men seem to have mastered the beast, when the kindly diurnal goddess brings the awaited bread and flowers in her gory hands, through the depths of the silence resounds the ironic laughter of the hills.”

JACQUES LE CLERCQ

HILL OF DESTINY

FOUR houses, aflower with cullion to the very eaves, stand out from amid the tall, stark wheat-land, between the hills, there where the flesh of earth rolls over in richly cushioned folds. Sainfoin, in full bloom, bleeds under the olive trees. Around the birch-trees, creamy sweet and sticky with sap, the bees dance.

A bubbling spring discharges its surplus water in two singing streams for the wind to scatter as they gush down from the rock. They run, panting, under the grasses; then, meeting, flow together over a bed of reeds.

These houses are Les Bastides Blanches, the remnants of a hamlet lying midway between the plains, which hum with the tumult and roar of steam threshing-machines, and the great lavender

desert, the wind's land, in the cold shadow of the Mountain of Lure.

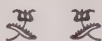
The wind's land. . . .

And the land of the beast, too. The adder glides out from a tuft of spikenard; the squirrel, under the vantage of his plumed tail, scurries by, an acorn in his hand; the weasel darts his muzzle to windward, a drop of blood glistening on the end of his whiskers; the fox marks the passage of the partridges in the grasses. The wild sow grunts under the juniper trees; her young, their mouths dripping milk, cock their ears towards the great, gesturing trees. Then, the wind rises over the treetops, a hush of peace falls upon the leaves. The sucklings, with grunting snouts, fumble for the mother's dugs.



The wild beast and the people of Les Bastides meet at the spring, beside that water which flows down from the rock and proves so grateful to tongue and hair. Night falls: at once the moor is alive with a vast stealthy creeping of furry feet towards the cool, rippling spring. And by day, too, when thirst grows unendurable. . . .

The wild boar, solitary, eyes the farms, sniffs the air. He knows the hour of the midday rest. He trots far out of his way under the foliage, then, veering suddenly, bounds forward. Now he has reached the spring; he wallows in the water; the mud lies cool against his belly, its chill piercing the very marrow of his bones. His teeth bite into the water, as the welcome freshness laps against his hide.



But suddenly he wrenches loose from these delights and gallops away towards the woods. It was the creaking of a shutter in the farmhouse he heard; he knows the shutter creaks when someone opens cautiously.

Jaume fires his load of buckshot point-blank. A linden leaf falls to the ground.

“What’re ye firin’ at, Jaume?”

“The wild boar. Look at ’un. There ’e goes, the son of a punk!”



The Mountain of Lure, blue and infinitely calm, dominates the horizon, barring the west with its huge, inanimate body of stone. Gray vultures haunt it, turning like sage leaves, all day long, in

the waters of the sky. Sometimes they set out on far journeys across the heavens; sometimes they spread their wings and sleep, floating on the flat currents of the wind. . . .

Then, Lure rises between earth and sun, and, long before nightfall, it is the shadow of the mountain that casts darkness over Les Bastides.



As for the dwellers on the hill, they are Gondran, who married Marguerite Ricard (her father, Jadet, lives with them); Aphrodis Arbaud and Babette, his wife, a woman from Pertuis way, with their two small daughters, aged five and three, respectively; César Maurras, his mother, and a little farm-boy from an orphan asylum; Alexandre

Jaume, who lives with his daughter Ulalie; and, finally, Gagou.

They are twelve in all, plus Gagou, whose presence makes the score an inauspicious one.



The dwellings enclose a little open space, in which the ground is beaten hard; this square is common property. There is a bowling-green along one side.

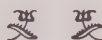
The women do their washing under a great oak and rinse the clothes in an old sandstone sarcophagus, chiselled within in the likeness of a man, tight-swaddled. The hollow of the corpse is filled with a greenish, mottled water that trembles as the insects scratch its surface. The sides of the heavy tomb are adorned with figures of women flagellating one another with branches of laurel.

Aphrodis Arbaud dug up this old stone one day when he was uprooting an olive-tree.



The houses take after their masters. Jaume's, for instance, is thickly covered with wild briony, which, over the door, reproduces the long, Gaul's moustache that overhangs the mouth of the owner. Yes, every house takes after its master. Arbaud's, ornamented and daubed with ochre twice a year, Gondran's, Maurras's and Gagou's.

Ah, Gagou's resembles the man, too!



The fellow came to Les Bastides three years ago, one summer evening, just as they were finish-

ing the winnowing of the wheat in the night wind.

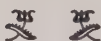
A piece of string held his rags together; he wore no shirt. His lip hung low; his eye was dead, but blue, blue. . . . Two great teeth jutted out from his mouth. He was all aslobber.

To their questions, he could answer only: "Ga, gou, ga, gou," on two notes, like an animal.

Then he danced, like a puppet, swinging his dangling arms.

An idiot.

They gave him food and a place to sleep.



In former times, many years ago, Les Bastides was a town, where the Lords of Aix were pleased to sojourn and breathe the sharp air of the hills. All their fine mansions have returned to earth; only

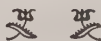
the peasants' houses still stand erect. Yet on the other side of the washing-place, two high grass-grown pillars mark what was once the entrance to a driveway. Here an iron gate stood sentinel before a country villa. Balconies, there must have been, round and polished as the bellies of goddesses, and terraces, lyrical with the measured swish of skirts in the wind, sonorous with the patter of high-arched heels.

Directly between the pillars, and some six yards back, Gagou set up his hut in the nettles. Being a hard worker and not unskilful with his hands, he built it out of sheet-iron, having gutted petrol-cans to do so. He also cleared away the grass at the foot of the pillars, bringing to light a great, noble name engraved on a scroll ornament, decorated with laurels.



The town is far away, the roads rough. When the wind blows from the south, the whistling of trains and the toll of bells from below are audible at Les Bastides. This simply means that rain threatens.

From town, when the heat-mist rends, Les Bastides Blanches look like doves nestling against the shoulder of the hill.



Last year, the postman used to come up often, indeed, almost once a week. That was when Maurras was doing his military service, in the Dragoons. But since his return, he does not need to write. He merely shouts, from the square or from the field, and his mother comes to the door to ask him what he wants.

Now the postman comes up to Les Bastides only at the end of the month, when loans made at the notary's fall due. His advent, therefore, is never welcome.

Whatever comes up from town—wind, rain, the postman—is inevitably fraught with evil. Everyone at Les Bastides is agreed on this score; everyone prefers the wind blowing up out of the desert of Lure, a wind which cuts, sharp as a razor, but which drives out the magpies and discovers, to such as know how to look, the hidden warrens where the hares are lurking. . . .



Gondran's house is the last one towards the plain. It is called Les Monges, perhaps because,

like a monk, it is lonely and russet brown, perhaps because it was, in times gone by, actually an hermitage. In truth, with its squat buttresses and its low, round door, it has all the air of a priest's house, the house of one of those priests, with not a little of the ruffian in them, who gladly provided bread and mattress to such lovers as stole away to celebrate their love in peace and seclusion.

Of the four houses, it is best situated. It stands guard over the road; it eyes the hill, rising directly at the edge of the slope that rolls down towards the depths of the valley. From its terrace, all the threads of road that lead down to La Clémentie are plainly visible.

In the beginning, it was Jadet's; he is the oldest inhabitant of Les Bastides; he has lived here since he was thirty. Jadet came to the uplands after having worked at every farm in the plain. No one was willing to hire him; he fought with all the hands;

twice a week the constable and bone-setter had to be called in. Jadet's wife died here; here, his daughter grew up. Now he is in the eighties, a lithe, straight man, hard as a laurel-trunk, with thin lips that barely slit the shaven surface of his face. The glance in his little brown eyes flies like a gnat to the sky, where he reads the weather; to the leaves, whence he divines future illness; and to the faces of men, where himself, liar and cheat that he is, detects lying and cheating.

Though he still lives here, people no longer speak of "Jadet's house"; they say "Gondran's house." Jadet has become reconciled to his son-in-law's mastery; he does not bridle at "Gondran's house," "Gondran's fields," "Gondran's horse, cart and hay," for he realizes that Gondran has taken his place. Gondran is tall, stout, red of hair and face; the plowshare lies straight in his hands;

he felled a vicious mule last year with a single blow of the fist.

Yet, all in all, Jaume resents that mastery and vents his particular grudge on his daughter, because through her he was supplanted. Ever since, according to Jadet, nothing Marguerite does is good enough.

"In my day, happened a woman knew how to make a proper bean soup!

"That hare's good, ay, but ye watered the gravy nine times."

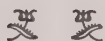
He would dearly love to see her well thrashed.

"If *I* war in yer shoes," he says to his son-in-law, "*I*'d tan her buttocks for her, so I would!"

"Ha, ha! I'll wager ye would!" Gondran answers, laughing.

Plump Marguerite toddles about on her stubby legs and, making a pout, arches her eyebrows good-naturedly:

“Ay, father, ye’re never satisfied.”



Today, Gondran goes out on the terrace. In one hand, he carries a bottle and two glasses; under his other arm, pressed firmly against his side, he holds a jug of cool water, from which a stream trickles all the way down his trouser-legs. He kicks the table into place, deposits the jug and glasses, then, gingerly, the bottle.

It is six o'clock of a fine summer's evening. Over by the washing-place, the women are singing. Gondran dangles his arms, then stretches out his great body, bowed by toil in the fields. After the exertion of his second stretch, he breaks wind. This is an invariable rite.

Then he sits down, reaches for his glass and slides it over the table towards him. He raises the bottle to the light; it is half-filled with a greenish liquor, and, at the bottom, packed with herbs, leaves and small brown seeds. Gondran compounded this absinthe himself from artemisia, which he picked on the hill, anis, which he orders from the postman, and his own white brandy. He pours his water drop by drop, clutching the neck of the jug tightly in his black, broad hand, holding it poised over his glass without the slightest tremor of fatigue. Next, he reaches for his pipe, draws on it twice. Across the motionless air, suddenly a wisp of noise reaches his ears. He leans over, peers at the turning by Les Ponches, down there among the hawthorns, where anyone travelling up the road must necessarily come into sight. Then:

“Marguerite,” he calls to the kitchen, “here ’e be!”

A gig is driving up-hill, tossing among the ruts like a dolphin. The jangle of pony-bells floats across the air.

Maurras goes by, dragging bundles of olive-wood behind him.

“César!” Gondran calls, “come an’ have a sup of absinthe.”

“Ye can be pourin’ my own out for me” the answer comes. “I’m for down yonder to feed the goats; I’ll be there betimes.”



The echo of the little pony-bells resounds from just behind the hillock. At length a gig drives up, crawls snail-like over the little square. The animal knows what to do; it moves over to the watering-

place alone. The man climbs up towards Gondran's house. As he appears on the terrace:

"Eh," he says in astonishment, "what is it you're drinking?"

Then, before they can answer:

"Come, now, give us a drop."

As though there was not an empty glass awaiting him! Before he reaches the table, Gondran winks at César:

"Heh! Just watch the doctor drink it!"

The doctor is red of hair, blue-eyed. His left eyebrow, inordinately long and curved, rises from his brow like a small horn. His wide, hairy hands are covered with freckles.

"Here's your good health!"

He drinks, wipes off the osier-bed of his moustache, and:

"Well?" he asks, "what's the trouble now?"

Gondran scrapes his glass over the table and

coughs. There is a pause. Gondran coughs once more. Drawing his glass towards him again, he leans on his elbows and at last:

“It’s my father-in-law,” he explains. “It come over ’un th’ other night, while we war waterin’ the meadow. I had ’un standin’ up at the far end, so ’e could warn me when the water started to flow; I went to th’ other end myself, to keep an eye on the pump. I know ’e went back to the house two or three times for a drink; I saw ’un passin’ by in the moonlight. Then, for a long spell, I couldn’t see ’un; ’e didn’t budge.

“ ‘Hi, Jadet!’ I shouted, ‘Hi, there!’ But ’e made no answer. At the time, I didn’t take on; I know all the old man’s bag of tricks. Ye see, often ’e lies down flat in the grass, and so long as the water’s not aticklin’ ’is head, ’e won’t wake up for no man. It’s one of them little tricks of his. Time and again I’ve told ’un: ‘Jadet, one of these fine

days ye'll drown, certain as fate!' Fat lot of good that does. . . .

"Well, I called, and never a word in answer. I thought to myself: 'All the same, it's funny the water's not come down yet!' But what with them fornicatin' mole-hills, ye can never tell! So I set to work diggin' up the big canal. The water swashed down hard as ye please; the grass sang like the wind. After a spell, I called 'un once more: still no answer. That war rather queer, I thought; I must own it gave me a bit of a turn. Seein' I had no light with me, I walked round the field. I was startled proper, I don't mind tellin' ye. 'What if ye war to find 'un dead?' I said to myself. 'At his age. . . .'

"And there 'e lay, stretched out the full length of 'un, stiff as buckram. The water warn't less than an inch from his mouth; it warn't an easy

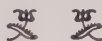
job draggin' 'un up out of it, I can tell ye. I sank in the wet earth knee-high, so I did.

"We put 'un to bed. Since then 'e's been eatin' and drinkin'; 'e chews his 'baccy, 'e speaks to us, 'e can move his fingers and half his arm; the rest of 'un's a dead stump.

"Go and have a look at 'un for yerself."

"That is what I came for," the doctor answers.

He sips his glass in little gulps, smooths the horn of hair that is his eyebrow, then makes for the kitchen. At once Marguerite's flat voice busies itself within.



"Another drink, César?"

"Ay, give us another!"

The doctor appears.

"Well?"

"He's an old man," the doctor says. "How old exactly?"

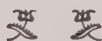
"Jadet's in his eighties."

"When a man gets as far along as that, there's nothing much left by way of remedy. Purge him. Give him anything he asks for. Personally, I doubt whether he has much longer to go. He's drunk plenty in his day, I suppose?"

Gondran smiles, looks up at César Maurras first, then at the doctor:

"Drunk plenty? Old man Jadet? Well, 'e war never what ye might call a heavy drinker exactly, but 'e downed his six pints or more every day of his life. Wine, that is; I'm not reckonin' the brandy, grog-sup, raven-water, neat wine and cherry-dram. The night 'e war taken bad, 'e'd lapped up a half-bowl of cherry-dram. . . ."

"It all tells in the end," the doctor says. "No, I don't think he has long to go. With a carcass like his, anything can happen. Do as I told you, though in my opinion it's like putting a poultice on a wooden leg. If he gets worse, you can come for me, if you like. But it's a long way off; it takes me three hours to get up here."



Night fills the valley with shadows, skims the loins of the hill. The olive-trees sing in the half-darkness.

Gondran accompanies the doctor as far as his gig, holds his pony's bit.

"Good-bye, Monsieur Vincent."

"Good-bye. Don't forget to purge him. He'll

possibly be delirious; you can always expect that with alcoholics. But don't let it frighten you."

Then, as the wheels of the gig grind round a few times, he thinks better of it, draws up his horse:

"Look here, I don't think it's worth your trouble to send for me again. Things will follow their normal course; there's really nothing to be done. By the way, you don't happen to know if I can drive through the short cut at Les Garidelles, do you?"



"Sometimes it'll last longer'n ye think," César says. "Look at old Burle. It took 'un one summer; 'e lived through the winter, an' the summer after.

Had to change 'un three times a day, they did. An' the worms crawled out from between his buttocks."



First, they put Jadet to bed in his own room, but he called for Marguerite a hundred times a day with the thin, shrill voice of a girl calling her goats. Now he wants the blankets taken off his feet, now she must raise his head; if he is not hungry or thirsty, it is his tobacco he cries for, and Marguerite must cut his plug with her sewing-scissors. Jadet's bedroom is three steps up; so, what with going up and down the steps all day, Marguerite's feet are swollen.

"Suppose we make up his bed in the kitchen? 'E'd be more comfortable and it wouldn't tire me out."

In the end, they set up his bed close to the hearth. If he leans over, he can see his daughter cooking supper over the cindery holes around the evil-glinting eyes of the embers.

And Jadet speaks. . . .

He speaks ceaselessly, like a spring, like one of those springs through which the long underground streams, risen from the very bowels of the mountain, spot out their waters.

“. . . The fair at Mane was the grandest fair for sluts in the whole country. There was Lance who made ye play a hand of cards. If ye didn't win the prize, ye slept with the wench in the hay-loft. . . .

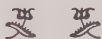
“. . . At the first inn on yer right, I'd usually have my onion soup. 'Twar sure as tares! I'd reach Volx at cockcrow. Then I bangs against the door with the bar of my brake and the mistress opens the window. 'That *you*, Jadet?' she says. (She knew

my knock all right!) Down she comes in her nightshirt an' opens the door for me. I gives her a bit of a tickle an' everythin's right as rain. . . .

“ . . . There 'e stood against the haybin, stickin' up out of the straw, settin' up his back. I knew 'e had his staff with 'un. 'So it's yerself, ye old swine!' I says. 'Ay,' says 'e like that, 'it's me and no other. Well, and isn't it lawful nowatimes for a man to have a bit of a rest at yer place?' 'e asks. 'I'll give ye lawful,' I says, takin' up my fork, 'I'll show ye . . . '”

Jadet laughs softly at the memory. Then his little steely eye turns towards the saucepans:

“Marguerite,” he calls impatiently, “are ye goin' to bring me my bean soup today or tomorrow mornin'?”



Tonight, Marguerite has not found time to do the cooking; Gondran must therefore content himself with a raw onion for supper. Deliberately, he unfastens the concentric layers one by one, dips them into the saltcellar and crunches them between his teeth.

The weather is reasty. The wind, today, blew up from the Rhône and by now doubtless the storm has blocked up the Pass at Mondragon. All day long, the rivers of the wind poured down into the hollows of the Drôme basin. It surged as high as the chestnut-groves, raising the very devil's tattoo among the great branches; it swelled, gradually, until it flooded the mountains, and, as their edges caved in, it streamed down the hillside, whirling the bunched leaves in a clutter before it. Now it whistles about Les Bastides through the stone flutes hollowed by the torrents. The woods dance. At intervals, an eddy of the storm strikes here: a flash

of lightning flares across the sky, there is a roar of thunder, the air is heavy with sulphur, gravel, ice. A dim, watery light tinges the glass of the window, against which the ivy, torn from its sockets, beats with thick, leafy arm.

The door to the attic grates on its hinges. Above stairs, there is a sound of creaking and squeaking, as though someone up there were crushing a litter of kittens under his heel. Night falls; the growl of the wind grows throaty, soars to a bellow. The dome of the sky rings like a roof of sheet-iron under the falling hail.

A vast moan echoes through the house. It cannot be the skylight, for the skylight is barred; nor yet the window; the window trembles, but does not moan. The door, then? But the bolt is brand new. Well, but—?

Gondran eats on. The onion crackles under his teeth; the sound prevents him from hearing dis-

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tinctly that long moaning cry, which troubles him. He ceases to chew.

Within, the plaint comes into being, rises, utters its rending shriek throughout all the tremulous flesh of the house.



Jadet lies stretched out, straight and stiff, under the sheets. His narrow body rises from the gray field of his blanket like the rib of a furrow. Somewhere, in the region of his chest, there is a stirring of thin, birdlike breath. He is like a seed striving to pierce its way through and plunge its leaves in the sunlight. Gondran conjures up this image as he sits eating his onion.

Tonight Jadet's look is stern, forbidding, with the blue granite of his face, the stark bones of his nose, his nostrils translucent as a vein of flint. One eye, open, cleaves the shadow with the glitter of stone—of one of those splinters of rock, hidden deep in the rich flesh of the earth, against which the smooth, broad plowshare, usually so straight to drive, suddenly breaks and turns over.

“What if 'twar to last all summer, and all winter, too, like with Burle?” Jaume wonders.

The old man appears to be moving his fingers. What curious game can he be playing?

With great difficulty, Jadet draws his hands out from under the coverlet, spreads them flat on the sheet, then looks at them with a glance that gradually dilates with horror. Slowly, the right hand moves forward, away from the left. Its movement is that of a branch, growing, pushing out: a vegetal movement. Now his right hand grips his left,

presses hard and stretches it, as though seeking to draw it out from a glove or a bond. Now slowly, still, heavily, as if swollen with a terrible strength, but a strength struggling to lift an immense weight, it strains forward towards the edge of the bed and makes as if to cast something from it. Then he begins again, doing the same thing, over and over, like a machine.

Gondran draws near. From where he stands, he can see the heavy veins in the old man's hands trembling like the cords that bind a live kid.

"Eh, but Jadet: what're ye doin'?"

The old man lies rigid as a wooden saint. He draws the little blobs of his pupils over into the corner of his eyes.

"The serpents," he says, "the serpents!"

"What serpents?"

"Serpents, I tell ye. Those in my fingers. I can

feel their scales wrigglin' through the meat of my fingers."

His thin laugh crackles like a pine cone crushed underfoot.

"I'm lyin' in wait for 'em: when their heads bob up 'n a line with my nail, I squeeze hard, and the entire beast comes oozin' out. Then I toss 'un down to the floor. Happens meantime a fresh 'un climbs into my fingers; then I've to pull 'un out too and toss 'un onto the floor beside th' other. It's a long job, but when my hand's empty, I'll be havin' no more trouble at all."

Gondran, nonplussed, stares at J̄adet, then down at the bedside-rug. He can see nothing there, save the pattern of red flowers and blue.

"Ye're out of yer head," he tells the other.

"Out of my head, am I? Out of my head? Look, I tell ye, look!"

Again, he makes the same gesture, as though forcibly to convince his son-in-law. The closed fist moves forward from the edge of the bed, opens out; Jadet's pupil gleams in the coign of his eye with a light of triumph. But Gondran can still see nothing; his confidence returns.

"Ye're out of yer head," he declares, "yer wits're wanderin'. There's no serpents in yer hand; there's nought down there on the ground, neither. If there war serpents there, I'd be seein' 'em, wouldn' I? I'd be seein' 'em," he repeats, shuffling his heavy shoes over the bare flagstones.

The shutter rattles; the ivy knocks against the window. The moaning plaint bears down from the attic, darts across the stifling air of the room, cleaves the odor of onion, of cold ashes, of sweat, is lost as it whirls under the quivering door.

"Out of my head, am I? Who're *you* to declare I'm out of my head?"

Jadet addresses the shadow, impersonally, heedless of Gondran, who stands looking at him anxiously, drinking in his strange words. . . .

“Ye believe ye can see everythin’ don’t ye: *you*, with yer poor, weak eyes? And ye believe ye see the wind, eh, *you* with yer great cleverness?

“Bah! ye’re not able to look at a tree, even, an’ see aught more ’n a tree!

“Ye believe a tree’s planted straightway in the earth, with bark, branch and leaf and all on it, and that’s all there be to it, and no more. God’s truth, ’twould be easy if that war the answer!

“Ye see nought there under the chair, eh? nought but only the air? An’ ye believe the air’s empty, heh? Ye believe the air’s nought.

“Yes, I know ye. There’ll be a house here and a tree there, and a hill, yonder; and all about, all about, ye believe the space empty, the air nought? Ye believe the house a house and nought besides?

The hill a hill and nought besides? Well, I never took ye for such a blarsted gowk!

“Look ye, under the chair there. A while ago, I tossed three of ’em over: one was a little feller, green all over, a grass snake; the back of ’un looked like three twined stalks of barley. I can’t tell ye wherefore, but when ’e crawled up out of my finger, ’e said:

“ ‘What’s on, old John?’ That’s not my name. I’m Jadet; Jadet, that’s my name.

“Then there’s another ’un, a fat shortish feller: a hell-belly, that ’un; an’ there’s one whistles a music sounds like a mouth-organ. That there one’s a female; the skin of her belly’s bigswoln; she’ll be spawnin’ her young soon. She hurt like mischief when she came through my finger.

“Look! Quick! Mark that ’un there, writhin’ up the side of the saucepan and lappin’ up the milk;

mark the great lumps of milk rollin' down the throat of 'un. Can't ye see 'un?

"So ye think air's empty, heh? If ye had 'em in yer fingers, as I have, ye'd know different. If ye'd met what dwells in the air, if ye'd come face to face with it suddenly some fine day by the roadside, ye'd be seein' 'em just as I do.

"An' the hill. The hill! Some day, ye'll be seein' the hill for yerself, so ye will. Nowatimes it's layin' down like an ox, restin' in the tall grasses, an' ye can see its back only; the emmets are crawlin' over its hair, runnin' every which ways. In the present hour, the hill's layin' down at rest. But if ever it rise, God help ye, then ye'll be knowin' if I'm out of my head and my wits wanderin'. . . .

"Look! Mark that 'un. Ooh, that beauty with apple-green eyes! Ooh, and that 'un, 'e's eyes like a man's. 'E's pullin' the livin' flesh off me, so 'e is!

Ouch! . . . Hey, look: now! There 'e be on the floor. 'E's wrigglin' about worse'n a severed worm. There 'e be, playin' dead. See 'un? The artful bars-tard!"

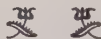
Gondran's glance sweeps the floor, the flagstones are quite bare under his eyes. But the bedside rug seems to be moving. Under the table, there, look, under the table, there's one! Under the table, there's a serpent, fat as your thumb, sleeping, curled up like an S.

"It's the tether of my whip."

"It's a serpent."

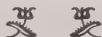
"It's the tether of my whip, I tell ye."

Outside, the burden of the wind crushes the oaks. Dead branches fall into the watering-place. The chimney bellows, the ashes whirl up like dust under the feet of passing sheep.



With one bound, Gondran reaches the door. He flings it open, pulling with all his might, so violently, indeed, that the handle of the bolt buries itself in the wall; and he bawls out to Marguerite, who is bundling the olive branches in the goat-shed.

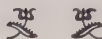
“Marguerite! Marguerite! God’s name, aren’t ye done yet, down there?”



Two whole days and two nights long, the wind blew. It was heavy with clouds; now, the rain falls. The storm, which had blocked the straits of the river, has lifted. Like a bull under the lash of sharp switches, it wrenched itself clear of the muddy plains; its sinewy back swelled; then it

leaped over the hills and set off at a gallop across the sky.

The rain falls, a slight rageful rain, now suddenly roused to a pitch of fury, then as suddenly becalmed, quite without motive, shot through with arrows of sunlight, smitten by the rude fist of the wind, but obstinate ever. It tramples the oats under the fall of its warm, speeding feet. The feathered multitude of swallows and blackbirds raises a tumult in the trees. The sky is like a marsh with clear waters shining out, here and there, from between soft pools of mire.



At first, Jaume settled himself under the oak-tree to sharpen his scythes. Under the shelter of its heavy foliage, he could afford to laugh at the women, as they scurried through the rain to gather

the linen which lay spread out on the ground. The folded sack on which he was sitting looks like a sponge.

Arbaud stands by the door of his barn, staring at the rain. He was about to set off for the hill; but when the storm broke he unharnessed his mule. Maurras and Jaume join him.

Rain. . . .

The spring sings antiphonally under the tree.

Gondran comes up, crouching under the down-pour.

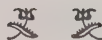
"Weather fit for the blarsted swine," he growls. "Every time I've to fetch up my straw, it's the same thing."

Gondran speaks. He chewed the cud of his words, over and over again, at great length; he cursed the weather, said all there was to say about the rain and the state of the ground. Now he comes to the head of the matter:

“God’s truth, I don’t mind sayin’ I never seen the like of it in my born days. I can’t make ’un out; I can’t puzzle out where ’e fetches up the things ’e speaks of. There’s no one like ’un; ’e’s as different as chalk from cheese. Ye can’t imagine it. Runs like a brook, ’e does, and there’s no call to laugh, neither. Marguerite can’t stay alone with ’un no longer; she’s mortal afraid of ’un, she is. Come along, now, we’ll be havin’ a sup of absinthe and ye’ll see for yerselves.”

“That business,” Jaume says, “that business puts ye in mind of . . . ”

He does not complete his thought. Perhaps he has some explanation to furnish—or perhaps he is waiting to see something that business puts him in mind of, before he commits himself.



They have only the little square to cross; the rain has abated somewhat. Almost at once, they reach Gondran's house.

Jadet is still stretched out on his bed, black and rigid. Palsy has made of his thin, long neck a motionless stake. Under his brown skin, his Adam's apple rises and falls as he swallows the juice of his quid. His eyes are fixed, once and for all, on the wall opposite the bed; they stare at the Post Office calendar that hangs there.

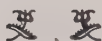
Gondran produces the glasses and absinthe. They speak in hushed tones, as they are accustomed to do when they lie in wait for a hare.

"The face of 'un's cruel bad!"

"Murrain-ill 'e looks and the nose of 'un beak-thin!"

"Jadet won't linger . . . no, 'e'll not last long. . . ."

(To assure Gondran that his father-in-law is dying seems to be an act of courtesy.)



Suddenly it started. First, came a little sigh, the kind of sigh a man heaves as he catches his breath before lifting a sledge-hammer. The men suspected nothing. Then, of a sudden, it fell upon them, before they could possibly make ready for it.



“On the meadow, there war little wisps of smoke . . . little wisps of smoke that war wummen . . .

“They bounded over the down of the grasses, their hair on end like the crests of peewits. . . .

“They war all colors, all the colors of the rainbow. Some of ’em war bottle-green, with skins pierced by the moon and all made up of little red and green dots. Them war wenches, ay; one’d a backside like a straw stack and corkscrew breasts; squirmin’ fierce she war and settin’ up a noise like ribbons in the wind, flickety-flickety-flick. . . .

“She war killin’ her fleas by lickin’ her armpits and scratchin’ her lavender so vicious her nails war cracklin’. . . .

“ ‘There’s a queer ’un,’ I says to myself. I moves forward, quite softly, takin’ my time; she war handlin’ her feet so loud it made music.

“An’ there war one drinkin’ at the brook like a proper lady, glub-glub-glub. She took the water up in a measure of barley, stretchin’ her mouth a span wide, showin’ off her fine teeth, she war, and

ashakin' her rump, so she war, like a crab-apple in the wind. . . .



“The toad, who made his home in the willow-tree, come hoppin’ out. His hands are the hands of a man, and his eyes a man’s eyes, too. ’E’s a man; this is his punishment. ’E built his house in the willow out of leaves and mud. His belly’s full of caterpillars and ’e’s a man, ay, a man. Eats caterpillars, ’e does, by the bellyful, but ’e’s a man; ye’ve but to look at his hands. . . .

“Mark ’un rub those little white hands of his over his belly to feel of himself. ‘It’s me, ay, it’s me, surely,’ ’e says to himself right smartly and ’e sets to weepin’ when ’e’s certain sure it’s himself. . . .

"I've seen 'un weepin'. His eyes are grains of corn, and, fast as his tears flow, 'e makes music with his mouth.

"One day, I asks myself: 'Jadet, who knows what thing 'e'll have done to be punished like that, with only the hands and eyes of 'un left for himself?'

"Them are things the willow-tree might have told me, happened I could speak its language. And I tried, ay, I tried, but there warn't nought to be done. Willow-tree's deaf as a post. . . .

"Well, between the two of us, toad an' myself, things went smooth until Michaelmas. 'E used to come to the edge of the grasses to look at me. I'd say to 'un: 'Hullo, mate! What's new today?' When I watered the ground, 'e'd follow me, every step I took.

"Once, at night it war, I heard 'un comin' towards me; 'e war draggin' himself over the mud

and goin' klu-klu-klu with his mouth to draw the worms. Along they come, dancin' with their backs and their bellies, they war. There war one of 'em fat as a white sausage, all tricked out with soft hair; there war another 'un looked like a sick finger. Toad put his hands on my feet. I didn't like his small, clammy hands on my feet. The brute had taken the habit of doin' that. Happened I come anywhere near 'un, to watch out for 'un was labor spent; 'e always managed to set his small clammy hands on my naked feet. By and by, I'd a bellyful! I finished 'un just as 'e war leavin' his home.

“ 'E war klu-klu-kluin', softly, whshht! Holdin' a black worm, 'e war, and eatin' off it. There war blood on his teeth an' his mouth all over blood, and his eyes of corn, drippin' tears. So I says to myself: 'Jadet, that's no good Christian

blood, ye may believe! and it's a good deed ye'd be doin' if . . . '

"So I severed 'un with my spade.

"'E war scrapin' the earth with his hands, an' bitin' the earth with the blood red teeth of 'un. There 'e stayed with his mouth full of earth and his eyes of corn, drippin' tears. . . . "



When Jaume meets a wild boar and his gun is loaded with Number ten shot, he hides. He has somewhat the same air now.

Arbaud and Maurras eye the door.

Outside, Gondran looks askance at them. The four stare at each other in silence.

“Well, what next, I wonder?”



After ten hours of night wind, this morning ushers in a virgin day. The first rays of the sun find their way into an empty air; they have no sooner taken wing than already they hover over the far hills among the juniper trees and over the thyme. It is as if the land, there, had moved forward overnight.

“Touch ’em with yer hands, ye could,” Gondran thinks.

The sky is blue from end to end: the lines of the grasses stand out, sheer, with each diverse shade of green discernible in the green patches of field. The wind blows an olive leaf on to a tuft of borage; the sea lavender is lighter than chicory, and,

in one corner, where the sacks of phosphate were dusted, clumps of rich fleshy grasses, almost black in hue, fuse like the liveliest hairs that grow out of a mole. So clear is the air that a man might count the very needles on the crests of the pine trees. But there is also something eerie: the silence.

As recently as yesterday, the sky was the arena of tumult; great chariots drawn by tempestuous, iron-shod mares raced by amid a thunder of galloping hoofs and a furious neighing.

But today, all is silence. The wind has blown over the rim of the horizon to rage on the other side of the earth. Not a bird, even. Silence. The very water no longer sings, though a careful listener might, nevertheless, just catch the echo of its furtive step, as it slips softly from meadow to lane on the tips of its little white toes.



Gondran looks at the new dawn and prepares his game-pouch. He is off to dig in his olive grove at Font de Garin, across country, yonder. It is a long way off, behind those three hills that lie athwart the valley. Aloof, they are, and heedless; Gondran must wind his way past them, treading over their bellies.

He carries his dinner with him: a fresh cheese in its wrapper of aromatics; six cloves of garlic; a jug of oil, stopped up with a piece of paper; salt and pepper in an old pill box; a cut of ham; a hunk of bread; wine; a roast rump of rabbit, rolled up in a vine leaf, and a small pot of jam. All these provisions lie pell-mell in his leather pouch.

In the kitchen, Marguerite stirs up the fire, jabbing it viciously with her poker, to bring the coffee to boiling point.

The silence is heavy as lead; the only sound in the morning is that of Gondran's heavy hobnailed

boots as he walks to and fro. Jaume's pigeons are usually the first abroad for dawn to juggle with nimble hand. But today the dove-cote seems dead.

Gondran walks over to the clock: yes, it's certainly four o'clock.

"Is the clock right?"

"I set it by the sun, day before yesterday. . . ."



Despite everything, this silence is fragrant; the perfume of honeysuckle and broom floats out upon great waves. And then, why fret over the gestures of Earth? Earth does as she wills; Earth is old enough to know what she is about; Earth carries on. . . .

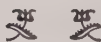


“Not much noise t’day,” Jadet says, “Ye’d think everythin’ war dead. Hark! not a mortal thing stirrin’. That’s bad, that is. Ye’d better be knowin’ it, my lad, same thing happened to me once. . . .”

“What?”

“It’s not a thing bears tellin’.”

Jadet stares up at the Post Office calendar.



Gondran slips his spade through the strap of his game-pouch and slings it over his shoulder. At the bottom of the stairs, he whistles his dog. Labri, who has been asleep under a rose-bush, comes out, stretches his limbs, sniffs at the pouch and follows his master. Gondran listens gratefully to the scratch of the ungular small paws behind him.

As soon as they are past Maurras's field, which straddles the slope, the road is, so to speak, nothing. It trickles away and loses itself in the grasses like a dribble of water.



The grove to which he is going, he bought last year from a man from Pierrevert who was raising money in order to obtain a contract for a branch Post Office.

It forms part of the Reillanne lands, the devil of a way off; but Gondran bought it for a song and the olive trees have already paid for themselves. All in all, with a little work, there is oil and wood; only it's a great distance away and the further since there is no road. There are the hollows to

cross; beds of torrents choked with tangles of viburnums and brambles to follow; hills to circle, through wild defiles where the stones have faces like human embryos.

Gondran muses that next time he would do better to go along the crests of the hills over toward La Trinquette; to be sure, it is rather steep but when you have scaled them, the walking is easy. The air is fine up there, you can hear the partridges sing. Below, here, the silence is truly awesome. Fortunately, the dog is along. . . .



Seen from the crest of Pymayon, Gondran's orchard is like a patch of tetter on the rockland. The hair around it grows healthy, thick, curly, but

that is where Gondran's spade has scraped the skin.

It is a grove aslope on the ample flank of the hill, there where the brooklets deposit their alluvion. Below, the torrent has cleft the earth in a narrow, black fissure, whose breath is cold as the mouth of an abyss. An old Roman aqueduct straddles it; its two legs, dusty and thin, rise up from the olive trees.



First Gondran digs a hole under the leafiest juniper tree, and, when he has struck black earth, lays his bottle there to cool. He chooses a fine branch, clear of the ants, to hang up his game-pouch; then he rolls up his shirt sleeves, sets to work.

And the steel of his spade sings over the stones.



The shadow of the olive trees has shrunk, little by little. A while ago, it covered the whole field, like a carpet woven with golden figures. As the sun climbed in the heavens and its rays fell straight, sheer, the shadow broke up into fragments, then rounded out, gibbous. Now it forms no more than a few gray blobs around the tree-trunks.

Noon.

The spade gives over.



The midday sleep.

The air, filled with flies, crackles like a green fruit under the knife. Gondran lies glued to the earth, sleeping with all his weight.

He awakes, utterly. He plunges into sleep and

re-arises from it with the same clean, quiet force. A single effort of his back and he is on his feet.

As his eyes seek his spade, his glance meets the face of earth.

Why this sense of apprehension weighing over him today?



The grasses shudder. Under the yellow oats, the long muscular body of a lizard; startled, it stands up to the noise of the spade.

“Ha! The son of a punk!”

The beast advances with swift leaps, like a green stone, ricocheting. It stands motionless, its legs stiffen; the live coals of its throat blow and splutter.

At once Gondran is a mass of strength. Power swells his arms, gathers in the wide hands on the handle of the spade. The very wood trembles. His will is to be the master-beast, the beast that kills. His breath flutters like a thread between his lips.

The lizard draws near.

A flash of lightning; the spade falls. Gondran stamps violently, tramples the writhing fragments under his heel. Now there is only a handful of shuddering mud.

To one side, the blood, thicker, reddens the earth; that was the head with its golden eyes; the little tongue, like a pink, delicate leaf, trembles, still, in the unconscious agony of the crushed nerves. A paw, with small toes rolled up in a ball, shrivels up in the earth.

Gondran steps back; there is blood on the edge of his tool. His heavy breath flows out, round and full: his anger melts in a deep gust of blue air.

Suddenly he feels ashamed of himself. With one foot, he kicks the earth over the dead beast.



Now the wind races through the air. The trees put their heads together, speak softly to one another, in concert. The dog has disappeared, no doubt on the trail of some beast of the fields.

Without knowing why, Gondran feels uneasy. He is not sick but oppressed; his oppression sticks in his throat like a stone.

He turns his back to a dense thicket, where elders, honeysuckles, clematis, and fig trees, grow in confusion. It roars and gestures louder than the rest of the wood.

As he digs, it occurs to him for the first time in

his life that a blood courses under all this bark, which is like his own blood, that a fierce wild energy twists these branches, flings these jets of grass to the sky.

He is also thinking of Jadet, somehow, and as he conjures up the figure of the old man, Gondran winks his eye at the little heap of brown earth that throbs over the crushed lizard.

Blood . . . nerves . . . suffering. . . .

Gondran has made flesh suffer, red flesh like his very own.

Well then, does every single act he carries out about him on this earth create suffering? Is he established in the suffering of plant and beast so firmly that he cannot fell a tree without killing?

He kills, when he fells a tree. He kills, when he swings his scythe. . . .

What? So he travels through life casually hewing down and killing right and left, all his days?

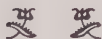
His existence passes like a huge barrel that rolls downhill, crushing all about it.

So everything on earth has life, then?

Jadet, before him, understood this.

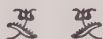
Everything—beasts, plants, and, who knows, perhaps even stones?

And he cannot lift his hand without making streams of pain flow about him?



He bridles up; leaning on the handle of his tool, he stares at the broad face of the earth, with its network of wounds and scars.

As the wind whirls through its empty channel, the aqueduct warbles, lugubriously, like a flute.



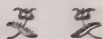
Earth. . . Earth spreading out on either side of him to infinity; rich, fleshy, big with its burden of water and tree, with its rivers, brooks and forests, its mountains and hills; with its vast cities spinning around amid the flare and crackle of lightning; with its hordes of humans clinging to its hair—what if Earth were a living creature, a body, animate? What if Earth possessed a power of its own, with forces of good and evil? A huge mass which could roll over me and crush me even as I crushed that lizard. . . .

What if this valley, what if this fold between the hills, at which I am scraping and rasping even now, were to stir under the sharp edge of my spade?

A body, a body with life . . . Life which means motion, which means sighs . . . (The voice of the aqueduct . . . the singing trees . . .)

Ay, life. For Earth moves. Did not Earth quiver,

ten years ago, down yonder near Aix? Did not whole villages crumble—Lambesc and others as well—and did not the chimes of Manosque ring out of themselves from the heights of their lofty belfries?



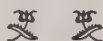
That conception surges within him like a storm, annihilates his reason. It racks his agonized soul, fastens its hallucination on his mind.

Slowly, over the horizon, the waves of the hills unroll their serpentine coils; the soil pants, with a light intake of breath.

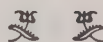
An immense life, very slow but terrible in the revelation of its might, quickens the gigantic body of Earth, moves, pulsing through it to raise the

paps of her mountains and hollow her valleys, to flatten her plains, bend her rivers, push up her heavy, grassy flesh.

Presently, to avenge itself on me, this life will sweep me upward, sky-high, upward, ever upward, amid those regions where the larks, even, lose their breath. . . .



With a turn of the wrist, Gondran sweeps up his game-pouch and with great strides climbs up towards the hill. He dare not even whistle his dog.



He spoke about it to Jaume, quite without false shame.

Since then, moreover, mystery lurks everywhere—in the wheat field, under the lucern field, everywhere about him—and yesterday the peaceful clump of the three willows creaked under his shoes like a dog about to bite.

Things cannot go on in that tenor; better they all meet and have it out.

For two whole evenings they discussed it over their absinthe. . . .

What counts most is Jaume's opinion. But Jaume does not speak much. Maurras and Arbaud are there also, their elbows on the table, their hands over their mouths. Jaume knows the hills best; he can read, too: not only the newspaper, occasionally, when he goes to town, but books as well. He even owns an Almanach! That's no slight thing. Ay, what counts most is Jaume's opinion.

For the moment, he scarcely speaks. He does not

say: "It is impossible." Though that is what they expect of him, he does not speak; he wags his head, breathes into his long moustache. Finally:

"We ought to have a look," he decides to say.

"So ye think it's possible . . . ?"

"We ought to have a look. . . ."

Jaume proposes to go up there tomorrow with his guns. Agreed: but who shall go?

"I'll go," Jaume declares. "Who else?"

The others scarcely look as though they intended to.

"I'd have gone with ye gladly," Maurras says, "but happens I've my stable to clean."

Arbaud stares at his absinthe.

In the end, they came to an agreement: Jaume and Gondran are to go, while the other two remain to guard the women.

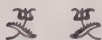
"After all, we'll be alone here, too," Arbaud remarks.

Through the curtain of the kitchen, Jadet's rasping voice runs on:

"So I'm out of my head, eh? My wits are wanderin'! Ye've seen the grumblin' of the wind, eh, ye artful barstard? And behind the air, eh, ye know what's behind the air, do ye?"

Young Maurras stops half way down the stairs:

"Ye should make 'un hush," he says in a hollow voice. "All that's not healthy."



They saw nothing.

All day long they lay stretched out under the junipers hiding among the twisted branches, their lives as though prolonged by the double-barrelled guns emerging from the grasses.

And today the clematis was still clematis; the fig tree remained but a fig tree; earth lay inert. Only a small, timid squirrel, dapper and swift, scudded across the Roman bridge, clawing the grit.

All day long not a word passed between them.

Jaume munched stems of peppermint. Gondran cleared his throat, in which the spittle was caking; the other signalled to him to hush.

Under the black glance of the guns, earth lies, vegetal and fragrant. Step by step, the shadows force back the sun; the wind of dusk bends the grasses, as the light sinks down behind the mountain of Lure.



Jaume touches Gondran's arm. They retreat, crawling on their bellies as far as the thicket. Then

with wide, free step, they return to Les Bastides.

Arbaud and Maurras stand near the oak, waiting for them.

“Well?”

“Nought!”

But Jaume takes his pipe from his mouth:

“Let’s be goin’ under the oak,” he says. “No use frightenin’ the women.”

Having led them aside, there Jaume seems to make up his mind: he speaks more volubly than he ever spoke in his lifetime.

“To my way of thinkin’, it’s a filthy business! When I told ye: ‘Let’s go yonder!’ I said it because somethin’ happened the other day that made me ponder. Ye all know how I went out to lay for the wild boar. I war on the slope up by Manin in the old pigeon-house. Well, at peep of dawn, I hears a light step over the leaves:

“ ‘It’s a young ’un’, says I to myself, and I slips

my gun softly through the hole and I watch: all around me war dwarf-oaks with an open ring of grass, and I watchin' the end of the trail. I seen a black ball come rollin' out, dancin' right queerly. 'That's not it,' I says to myself, 'let's wait a while.'

"Up it leaps, again, and rolls over, around and around: then it stretches itself out in the fresh sun and I seen it was a cat. . . . A black cat . . . black from head to foot. . . .

" 'So far, so good!' says I. There 'e war, layin' on his belly and raisin' his neb into the streamlet of sunlight; then 'e lay down on his back and combed the grass with his claws, jugglin' about with the blades of grass, in a word, all a cat's calendar of tricks.

"I had 'un at the point of my gun. And if I didn't shoot at that moment, 'twar because I knew or reckoned I knew.

"I warn't wrong, neither. After a spell, 'e

straightens up on all four legs, the legs of 'un taut as wire, an' his mummary changed its tune. 'E took three steps to one side, three to th' other, then stood facin' the break in the hill, through which ye can see our country all the way to Digue. 'E mewed. Then I raised my gun and drew 'un in so quiet ye could have heard a leaf drop. An' I stood dead still in the shadow of the pigeon-house, for I know what that mewin' of the cat means."



All the evening air seems to freeze into silence. Jaume draws twice on his pipe; it has gone out. He rubs his flint, lights up again, and, as he sucks on the flame, he looks in turn at Gondran, at Maurras, then at Arbaud, who stands twisting a straw between his fingers.

There is a pause.

"Ye may recall the quake of 1907," he says. "Twar of a Thursday. Monday before, while layin' for partridges, I seen the cat.

"As for that storm St. Pancras day, ye recollect, when the stream carried off Magnan's grindstone and the little cradle together with the mother who war tryin' to fish it up—t'war on a Tuesday—well, Sunday before, I seen the cat.

"When yer dad war struck by lightnin', Mauras, in the charcoal-burner's hut, I seen the cat two days before.

"I seen the cat, I heard 'un mew, and, two days later, when I opened the barn, I found my wife hangin' there.

"When Gondran told us of the trouble fallen on 'un, I thought of that cat. Now hark to me: watch out! Whenever the cat turns up, it's two days before some fit of Earth's wrath.

“Ye can’t trust them hills, I tell ye. There’s sulphur under the stones. Want me to prove it? Ye know that spring runnin’ down the valley of La Mort d’Imbert, an’ purges ye with each mouthful. It’s made of a flesh and a blood we know nought of, but it has life.”

Again, Jaume’s pipe goes out: he forgot to draw on it through the clay stem. He turns towards Gondran:

“As for yerself, Gondran, ye’ll maybe be able to learn the secret. There’s Jadet. I’m not sayin’ this against ye, but it all began with ’un. It’s not against ye nor against ’un, I say it; ye know nought about it, nor did ’un.

“Things like that, ye know, always start with a man who can see further ’n the others. When a man sees further’n the others, trouble is there’s somethin’ twisted in his brain. It may be a trifle sometime, a mere thread, say; but from then on, the

game's up. A horse is no longer a horse, a blade of grass no longer a blade of grass; all that we don't see, 'e sees. There's a sort of smoke floats aroun' the shapes and lines that we're familiar with; it's the surplus, the overtone, ye might say. Ye recall what 'e said about the toad? Seems as though there's someone beside 'un makin' everythin' clear to 'un, strippin' the husk off everythin'.

"In a case like this, we already know a lot; we'll be learnin' the rest from Jadet.

"Ye can be quite sure 'e's a finger in the pie. 'E's always been very close to earth, closer 'n we have. Used to put the snakes to sleep, 'e did; and 'e knows the taste of a whole heap of meats: fox and badger and lizard and magpie. . . . Used to make soups out of melon, too, and 'e likes nought better than chocolate in a stew of codfish. Blood comes out of everythin' ye eat and the brain's the scum of yer blood.

"Listen to 'im, Gondran; try and find out. It'll be of help to us. . . ."



The women call them in to supper.

Through the darkness, Les Bastides is no more than a few faint lights under the trees. A great star soars over the hills.

The men return.

"Don't shove," Arbaud says softly to young Maurras, who presses against his elbow.



The morning of the second day: not a breath of wind, and silence, silence. . . . A heavy crown of

violets weighs on the serene brow of the heavens. Through this cloud, the sun rises like a pomegranate. The air burns like a sick man's breath.

Young Maurras opens the door of his small barn. He looks at the houses, one after another. They still sleep, mute, like tired beasts. Gondran's alone hiccoughs gently behind its hedge.

He goes out, takes two steps across the square, climbs up on a roller to see better. The eyes of the house are open—great, wide eyes over which the round shadow of Marguerite passes like the rolling of an eyeball. Its open portal dribbles out a thread of dishwater.

Maurras makes up his mind. He advances noiselessly on his raffia sandals.

"Gondran," he calls. His voice is muffled, yet it carries across the calm of the morning air.

The other appears in the doorway, raises one finger to his lips:

“Shh!”

He appears to be listening for something; he pricks his ears towards the kitchen. Then he comes out on tiptoe.

“Well?” Maurras asks.

“Just the same as ever. A terrible night, my skull’s burstin’! I tried to remember enough of it to tell Jaume, but it’s like water, it won’t hold in yer clenched hands. It war like a flock passin’ by: the noise, and the bells, and all the eyes in all the heads, with a picture in every eye. The things I seen in his words. . . . It’s impossible for ye to imagine ’em. . . . My head’s like a bee-hive, I tell ye. But I do remember ’un speakin’ about the cat. Marguerite war drinkin’ her coffee; she war settin’ up a clatter with her spoon, an’ I made her hush. It war light, ye would have thought it war oil runnin’ out of a cracked oil-can; he spoke to himself, inside of ’un, ye un-

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derstand? I war a-pointin' my ears as much as I could; the bitch of a clock war strikin': bing, bing, bing! I slips in behind the head of the bed. 'E war sayin':

"'Catlin', dearlin', lordlin', seedlin' of Grimalkin, yer backside's freezin' on yon hill; make ye a man's bed, with yer claws like a plow's blade and yer little tongue gratin'. It's Jadet speakin' to ye, d'ye hear me? I'll pare yer cursed claws with my hedge-bill, so I shall.'"

"'E said that? Ye're sure?"

"Ay, certain sure; I copied it down on a bit of newspaper."

"Ye don't think . . . happen there'd be some cure . . . maybe. . . ."

"A cure?"

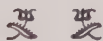
"Ay, a cure for that business of the cat. A charm, a trinket, I reckon—I don't know rightly. Ye know

what I mean: tresses of horsehair, the hoof of a he-goat, a parrot's feather, ye know what I mean. . . ."

"Maybe so. If we think of it, the thing might work. We'd have to look in his hidin' place, near the willows, where 'e used to keep his bottles."

Marguerite half-opens the door and passes her head through the chink. A few white patches shine on her face; it is her way of being pale. She signals to her man:

"Quick! Come quick! Make haste! Come in!"



Maurras remains alone in the morning air.

The sky is now like a great blue grindstone,

sharpening the scythes of the cicadas. The violet mist begins to flow into the hollows like a river of mud.

Above the shoulders of the houses, Arbaud's meadow appears on the hill, with the mown hay lying scattered on the ground. No one dreams of turning and storing it; for the moment, there are other cares.

Maurras returns to his house. His raffia sandals and the carpet of dust liken him to a shadow moving noiselessly. But as he reaches Jaume's door, it opens. Jaume stands there in the darkness: only his eyes and moustache are visible.

"Well?" he asks.

Maurras explains his idea of a charm.

"It's not that way we must be lookin' to remedy the evil. No—I know what we must do. And I'll be sayin' so when the time comes."

Then, in low tones, he adds:

“And, above all, ye must beware of Jadet—that’s what!”

He closes the door again; the click of a bolt, drawn.

At Arbaud’s house, a shutter opens; there, too, they are on the watch.



Quietly, serenely, hour elbowing hour, the day they feared so greatly, dawns.

They went to Jadet’s hiding-place and there they found two empty bottles, a bit of tinfoil from a chocolate-wrapper, and a dry-root, curiously shaped. Maurras put it in his pocket. Jaime shrugged his shoulders:

“No, it’s ourselves the cure must come from. All

them roots and cypress berries and gewgaws are no use, I tell ye. The cure? The cure lies in our arms and in our heads, that's where. In our arms, mostly. The hills—ye've got to treat 'em like restive horses. Ye can take my word for it, I know 'em well; I've not hunted over 'em for thirty years without learnin' their ways of doin'. 'Twill fall on our necks from some corner we've failed to watch. And no sooner it does than we'll have to face it and stand up to it and put our arms to work. Who'll beat? We will. There's not a shadow of doubt about that. It's a cruel siege we've to go through with, but I'm willin' to lay money we'll win. It's always happened that way. Only, if we want to be winnin', mustn't be caught nappin'."

But, for all that, Maurras put the root in his pocket. And Arbaud said: "Let's have a look!" Maurras showed it to him: it was like a little pitchfork polished by knife. In a whisper:

“Keep it . . .” he urged, “ye can never tell. . . .”

Eventually they were forced to explain matters to the women who had already shown their astonishment at the work abandoned and at all these meetings around Jaume.

“So that’s it!” they exclaimed. And each fell to, telling her own little story. One saw the cat; the other heard voices in the trees; Babette spoke of her wardrobe which mutters to itself like a grown person. Marguerite knew about it already. But so far as Marguerite is concerned, you have three layers of grease to pierce before reaching sensitive flesh.



At night, they barricaded themselves in.

Jaume carefully loaded the six barrels of his three guns. His tall daughter, dry and brown as a

vine-shoot, weighed the powder in the little scales:

“A little more ’n for the wild boar,” she said.

Then, holding it in the hollow of her hand, she passed it to her father. She, it was, glanced over the bolts, plugged up the hole in the sink with a rag and went over the house from cellar to attic until her father’s call: “Ulalie, bedtime!” brought her back to his side.

Babette prepared a little night-light for the bedroom, then rolled herself up under the sheet, her head against her knees, while her husband undressed. As he was about to climb into bed, she poked her nose out:

“Aphrodis, did ye close up the barn? Ye should have drawn the plow across the door. . . .”

And she kept up the same strain so steadily that Arbaud finally gave in. But he had not left the room before she leaped up from bed, in her night-dress:

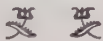
“Aphrodis, wait for me. Don’t ye leave me alone. I’m comin’ along with ye.”

Maurras made up his bed in his mother’s room; the little farmhand came to the door, scratched at the panel, crying; he was unwilling to sleep alone in the attic. They let him in, laid a mattress for him on the floor.

Gondran and Marguerite sat by Jadet’s bedside, their eyes numb, their mouths bitter, their hearts riddled with anxiety, mystery and fear.



And quietly, serenely, hour elbowing hour through the night, the day they feared so greatly, dawns, and now it is upon them, breaking over the crest of the hills. . . .



With one bound, the sun rises over the rim of the horizon. It plunges into the sky like a wrestler on the swing of its fiery arms.

All of them come tumbling out: the men, the women, the two little girls, the dog Labri. They move with great haste; they would wish to have done with the business already; ever since midnight, they have been on the watch for daylight. Gagou, leaning against his pillar, observes them.

They gather under the oak; all turn towards Jaume, without a word. Jaume understands he must head them, he must be their leader. He knew it must be; it is good so. He carries his two guns slung over his shoulders, Ulalie follows with her own—no lady's piece, that, but a good, hefty double-barrelled weapon, with both barrels choked. Over her hip, a bag filled with cartridges.

Babette is there, a little girl in either hand, like some fine tree that might go walking abroad with

its fruit. There she stands with her two little daughters, scrubbed clean, a touch of powder on their faces, dressed in their Sunday best:

“Ye can never tell. . . .”



Jaume draws the men aside:

“We’ll leave the women,” he says. “I’ll tell ye: I’ll be goin’ up to Les Sablettes and tryin’ to see what’s what up there. Maurras’ll stand watch around Bournes way; Gondran’ll lie in wait by Les Ubacs, and Arbaud keep an eye on Les Adrets. What ’re ye to watch for? All and nought: the weight of the air, the heat, the coolness, the wind and the clouds, ye can always learn somethin’ from ’un. Let’s be off. . . .”

Without more ado, he strides off, taking great, long steps. Before disappearing into the thickets of broom, he turns around, and, making a trumpet of his hands, calls out:

“It always comes from the side ye’re not watchin’. Think of everythin’, careful does it, keep yer eyes open. And, mind, if ye see the cat, don’t shoot.

Then he disappears among the high grasses.

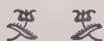


The men are gone. Gagou emerges from the frame of the pillars.

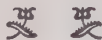
He advances onto the square, moving towards where the women stand, his arms dangling, his head thrust forward, like a puppet, dancing.

His lip hangs; he slobbers, his chin is glairy with saliva. A grimace, which is his smile, wrinkles up his nose and the circle of his eyes.

Now, on the little square, he jumps up and down clumsily, swinging his arms. Right foot, left, right, left; then his arms: right, left . . . His steps go tap, tap, and the dust rises, blue and brown, about him, like a smoke.



They stood sentry over the paths to Les Bastides until noon. Nothing happened; no sign of life, no cat or anything else. But must misfortune necessarily travel along the road? Is there not space aplenty over the heads of men, between their hair and the clouds?



In point of fact, Gondran is even now examining the shape of the clouds.

There's one of them that leans heavily down on the back of the hills like a land of sky, a vast land, utterly deserted, with shadowy valleys and naked cruppers slippery with sunlight, with slopes rising tier on tier. But is it utterly deserted? Who shall say? Who knows but that there are celestial mountaineers up there, men with long black beards and teeth dazzling as suns? A land above the land of men. . . .

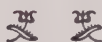
Before, Gondran was examining the clouds, searching for a hint of an impending storm, for that pallor which precedes the livid hail; now, he no longer dreams of hail. Hail means the wheat flattened out on the ground, fruits hacked to pieces, the death of the grasses, and what then? No—Gondran is no longer on the look out for something that threatens the grasses, he is watching for some-

thing that threatens himself. Grass, wheat, fruit—let them perish! His own skin, first!

He hears Jadet's voice again:

"So ye know what's behind the air, eh, *you*, with yer great cleverness?"

And so it goes until they call to him from Les Bastides.



It was only the midday meal.

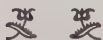
The calm morning has comforted them somewhat. And, more still, that fine cabbage-and-potato soup that clings to a man's belly and brews up a fine, clear blood for him in a trice, a blood that leaps from his heart and goes pulsing down the runnels of flesh and brain, all hope, all energy.

“Mark my words,” Arbaud says, “we’ll have had a proper fright, but we’ll get off scot-free!”

To be sure, they were quite right to stand on their guard, the more so since they had received no uncertain warning; but so far, things seem to be working themselves out all right.

They lie down under the oak, composed for sleep.

“Heh, there, quiet,” they shout at Gagou, who has been drumming on an empty oil-can for hours. They throw stones at him. Gagou stops his noise.



Silence, it is, awakens them, an eerie silence, deeper than usual, intenser than any silence ever

they knew. Something is gone, vanished; there is a void in the air.

“What’s up?” Gondran cries out in alarm.

At once, they rise. There is something amiss, something lacking in the consonance of noises about Les Bastides. What can it be?

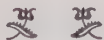
It struck them suddenly, in a flash.

They look about them, craning their necks, turning their heads with small, spasmodic jerks. For a long time, studiously, they examine familiar objects: roller, harrow, plow, winnowing-machine, then, coming back again, plow, harrow, roller. . . . Everything right as a trivet, just as usual.

Yet something seems to be amiss.

As one body, they turn towards the spring.

The spring has ceased to flow.



Jaume comes up while they are making their last effort. Everything has proved vain.

Gondran puts his mouth to the pipe of the fountain. The iron tube fills his mouth; he draws on it with all the power in his lungs. With every breath he heaves, there is a sound of gurgling somewhere in the depths of the rock; Gondran steps back at once. But only a jet of his saliva, which had stuck against the iron, trickles back.

One after another, all of them were forced to attempt it; rust lies on all their lips.

“It’s too deep,” Jaume tells them, “ye’ll never manage that. To be sure, ye warn’t here yet at the time they laid down this fountain: the pipe runs straight as a die, slopin’ a trifle, right up yonder, d’ye see, by that little fig-tree? There’s a pocket of water there. If it’s not runnin’ no longer, either the pipe’s clogged up or else there’s no water flowin’ at all. So ye can suckle away till ye’re

blue in the face, mate, for all the good it'll do ye. No: we'll be diggin' up the pipe tomorrow, instead. . . ."



This morning they unearthed the iron piping from end to end. Now it lies along the hill like a great purulent serpent. But the trouble lies elsewhere. . . .

They looked for the stone slab; it lies buried under the juniper tree. They loosened it, pulled it up. Bowed over the hole, they listened. No sound of water running.

"Sometimes," Jaume says, "this water makes no noise. It oozes out of the earth quite softly, and, when it's done, it makes puddles enough for ye to

have water for the rest of yer born days. I'm goin' down to have a look at 'un!"

Jaume is as good as his word; the hole is not deep. The others pass an oil-barrel down to him.

"Hooloo!" Arbaud calls, "All right?"

Jaume's voice rises with the smoke of the oil:

"The water's gone. It's dry as a bloody bone."



"It's all right for us," Marguerite says. "But Jadet? What'll we do about his soup and his portion? I've no more 'n a mite left in the bucket . . . an' I can fetch up the water I took down for the goats. . . . What did Jaume say? Has 'e no inklin' of what's to do? Don't 'e know if we'll find some . . . ? It's all right for us, we'll drink wine,

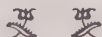
that's certain; but what about Father? I'll have barely enough for today—enough, maybe, for tomorrow, but after . . . ? What about afterwards . . . ?”



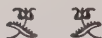
This morning, long before daybreak, the four of them went to the very heart of the hill and set to work, searching. They dug a hole in the ground down to the black earth; Jaume glued his face to it and sniffed.

Then they dug another hole, a few yards further along . . .

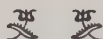
They knew an instant of hope when they saw a cluster of reeds. But these were reeds the old spring quickened and they are even now perishing. . . .



On the evening of the third day, they returned, crushed with fatigue, broken, most of all, by disappointment. And avidly, they drank down deep draughts of cool wine.



“It’s all right for us,” Marguerite says, “but what’ll we do about his soup and his potion? I’ve no more of it left, not a drop . . . Babette’s got none, neither, nor old Mère Maurras. Ulalie gave me a potful, barely enough for this evenin’.”



Gondran walks out to the oak with all his paraphernalia: his razor, his leather strop, his soldier’s tin wine-mug, his shaving brush and mirror.

He carries all his equipment pell-mell, huddled against his breast; but the wine-mug, he holds out in front of him, between thumb and index-finger, gingerly.

In the trunk of the oak, there is a nail to hold his mirror, the stump of a branch to hang his towel on. It's really very handy indeed.

He begins soaking his face; the lather is mauve-colored. Jaume stares at him:

"What're ye shavin' with?"

"Wine, by God. I've had to do it before, once, in the wilds, during the big manoeuvres."

"Prankin' yerself out, eh?"

"I'm doin' it mostly to get me out of there for a spell," Gondran answers, pointing to his house.

Jaume stands by a moment listening to the razor as it rings over Gondran's cheeks. He looks at the fountain. Under the spout, the moss is white as a goat's beard.

“Ye know what I’m thinkin’? Strikes me Jadet could find that spring for us, maybe?”

“Jadet? Ah, there’s a barstard for ye!”

“’E’s not so bad as all that; I tell ye, Gondran, years ago, that father-in-law of yours war famed for the wisdom ’e had of the waters. Ay, ’e knew a powerful lot about it, I’m tellin’ ye. The well-sinkers used to come and sound ’un out before ever they set to diggin’. When ’e war still livin’ down in the plains, I remember, Monsieur Boisse, who war sinkin’ his own wells thenadays, drove up after ’un in his carriage special to fetch ’un. ’Twar before ye wed Marguerite, and ’twar Jadet found this water-pocket here:

“‘Dig down there,’ ’e said, ‘it isn’t low; I can feel ’un.’

“Well, we began by laughin’ our bellyful, then we had to dig where he said, we did, and we found ’un. I’m for goin’ and seein’ Jadet!”

"All right, if ye want to."

Gondran scrapes his chin cautiously. At its tip, there is a small dimple where he invariably cuts himself.



"Well, Jadet, how's it goin' with ye lately?"

"'E can't recognise ye," Marguerite whispers.

Jadet's glance, crystal clear, turns on Marguerite:

"She's demented, the wench! Can't recognise 'un! God Almighty, d'ye believe I've turned?"

"Eh, but he's still got a good pair of ears."

Jaume sits down at the foot of the bed, close to the long body, all bones and flesh, and:

"How goes it, Jadet?"

"Goes hard . . . and it's endurin' long. . . ."

"Are ye sufferin'?"

"It's my head."

"Ye've a headache?"

"No. My head's not like others': it's full, see, and it cracks, all alone, in the shadow, like an old basin. I'm left all alone all the time and I can't speak; it piles up inside of me; it weighs down the bones of me. 'Course a little of 'un runs out of my eyes, but the big pieces can't get through, they stick in my head."

"The big pieces of what?"

"Life, Jaume."

"Pieces of life? How do ye mean?"

"Well, I'll tell ye:

"I can remember everythin' . . .

"I remember I picked up a piece of string on the Montfuron road, as I was on my way to the

fair at Reillanne. I tied up my whip with it, so I did. I can see the string, I sees the whip and the wheel of the cart like I seen it when I stooped to pick up the string. I can see the fetlock of the mule I had thenatimes. On the wall, there, facin' me, I sees 'em all the time: the string, the whip, and the wheel. I close my eyes and it's in my head . . . And that's how it be with all I ever done.

"Now I've spoken to ye about it, seems to be easin' up a little."

"Ye remember everythin', Jadet?"

"Everythin'. Even such things . . ."

"Such things? . . ."

"I mean such things as ye do, sometimes, while ye're believin' they'll be blotted out; yet they stick, for all that: afterwards ye meet up with 'em again in time, standin' there straight as a pike, lyin' in wait for ye. . . ."

“Evil things?”

“Evil? Can ye tell me what’s evil and what’s good?”

Jaume is silent. In the old man’s words lurk portents through which obscure, hidden forces rumble.

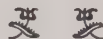


“Marguerite, water.”

Jadet’s tone changes as he asks for a drink. Marguerite comes softly towards him with a little water in a cup.

“Ye still have some,” Jaume asks under his breath.

“It’s Holy Water I fetched up for Palm Sunday. ’Twar in the wardrobe. Might as well be of some use.”



"If ye remember everythin', Jadet, ye must remember the day ye found the spring?"

"Ay, ye were one of those laughed at me, too, eh?"

"Who could have dreamed . . . ?"

"Ye're all the same, all of ye. Ye're always wantin' to understand. One man does this, why? Another does that, why? Let 'un who knows, do. Did I find the spring, yes or no?"

"Certainly, ye found it."

"And war it fine water?"

"Ay, it war fine water."

"What more de ye want then?"

Suddenly Jaume makes up his mind.

"I'd like to know for myself how ye did it. I'd like to know how ye must pull about the earth or if there's a certain grass marks the place where the water runs?"

Jadet interrupts:

"Take a look and see if ye can find my quid."

"Where?"

"In the sheet there, look around a bit."

Jaume finds the little wad of tobacco chewed up and still wet.

"Give it us!"

He slips it into the old man's mouth.

"Ye know the song, Jaume?"

*"At the Pertuis fair
Ye gives ten feet
Or the ostler in the stable
Cleans ye out neat!"*

Jadet laughs. A thread of tobacco juice trickles from the corner of his lip.

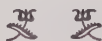
"Ah, ye old scoundrel," Jaume says jokingly, "ye're wrigglin' out of it; ye're not willin' to tell me yer secret for findin' water."

"It can't be done, son. Ye're born with 'un, and

if ye've not got 'un at yer birth, ye kin whistle for 'un. It's yer mother's belly teaches ye; ye should have tried to learn sooner. Too late nowa-time. Isn't the water ye've got plenty for ye? Isn't my water good? Such hill water ye'll never find the like of."

Jaume is about to tell him that the spring is dead but Marguerite anticipates, laying her fat finger on her lips. And anyhow, Jaume is quite sure now that Jadet would refuse to utter a word. Is it his natural cunning, illness or wickedness . . . ?

"I knew it," Gondran says as he comes in. "What can ye get out of *that!*" He points to Jadet, who at last lies silent. "'Un's all rotten, from the crown of his pate to the soles of his feet!"



It is hardest from noon onward.

For the last two days, the sun seems to have leaped towards the earth; its brazier, drawing nearer, cracks at the edge of the sky. The heat falls thick as a rainstorm. The air trembles, turbid with great viscous whirlwinds.

Now they drink only wine; the avid throat demands it ceaselessly. Yet their thirst persists.

The hours are filled with a great dream through which dance silvery waters.



Everything is ready for the expedition: their ropes, cans, lighter, iron-tipped staffs, and gun. Now they have but to wait for nightfall. It will be dark soon: the sky is green; the light clouds, rosy

a moment gone, deepen very gradually to a cobalt blue; all the white dust of the sun settles down in a cup on the horizon; the shadow of Lure rises.

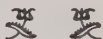
Their plan is as follows. Since it is established that, no less than twice, Maurras saw Gagou come back at dawn, his trousers caked with mud and his hair streaming with water, they will follow him to-night. Gagou must surely have discovered a spring somewhere; anyhow, they will soon find out. Admittedly, it were preferable not to venture across the wastes by night, but that is the only way they can follow.

After all, there is a moon. Look: little by little, the shadow of the cypress grows black, it is etched out upon the grasses. . . .



In loud tones they bid each other good-night. They walk about on the little square. The doors bang, the shutters clatter, more obviously than usual. Gagou must be made to believe that they are going to bed.

A light night wind rustles through the foliage of the oak tree. A nightingale sings.

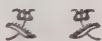


“There ’e be,” Jaume whispers.

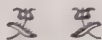
The moon lights up the two mossy pillars and the hut of sheet-iron. Gagou comes out. He wears only his rags; his back is bare, his great head rises towards the moon. In the white light, he puts out his slobbering lip, emits a rhythmic chuckle. Gagou is singing.

He dances, too. The moonlight fills him with a light tumult; he advances softly, as though on the tips of the grasses, almost without moving his feet; his hips undulate, he reels, drunk with the evening. He emerges from between the pillars.

And, with one bound, he plunges forward, as though to swoop down upon the night.



“We’ll be lettin’ ’un get ahead a bit,” Maurras says. “Gagou’s a sharp ear. That’s the road ’e takes to come home in the mornin’. I know ’e goes past La Thomassine; we won’t be losin’ him.”



Beyond the clump of trees at Les Bastides, the path Gagou takes leads to the moor, stretching out flat as a man's palm and rising very slightly towards the high ledge of Lure. Ahead, Gagou walks forward at a dancing gait.

"Let's follow 'un!"

Jaume rises and Maurras. Arbaud and Gondran stay behind to protect the women.

"I'd have liked to've waited for Ulalie," Jaume says. "She left again this afternoon and she always comes home late. She's out after water, too. Will ye look out for her, Gondran, and tell her to go and sleep at yer own place. She won't be all alone, that way."



Beyond La Thomassine, there are two roads.

Two roads is perhaps an exaggeration; more exactly, there are two directions to follow from there. On one side, the moor slopes down very gradually to the dry bed of a torrent. This leads eventually to Les Plaines, beside the road to Reillane. On the other side, there is still the naked moor, sloping upward very slightly; a passage through the cut of a rock leads to a large bell-shaped amphitheatre of hills, directly below Lure. It is still waste land here.

In the centre of the valley, lies the dusty skeleton of a village. It is quite uninhabited; there are five such under Lure. This particular one was abandoned because of the cholera in '83. There were a hundred dead, ten in a single day; only about a score of women and children were spared. These left the mountain, their bundles on their shoulders, and, travelling across country, filtered into the towns of the plain by night. Since then, no one has come back; the houses are crumbling ruins. Down

the streets, choked with nettles, the wind snores, sings, bellows, howls out its music through the cavities of shutterless windows and gaping doors.

Gagou makes for the village.

"Hep," Maurras calls softly.

They halt. Gagou's light step echoes ahead of them.

"'E's goin' up there!"

"Ay—looks like it!"

"Ye don't mind goin' there at night?"

"So long as there's a couple of us, ay. If I're alone, I'd sooner turn back, but a couple of us—and we've got to find out where 'e fetches up that blarsted water of his."



The moon makes a strange creature out of Gagou. Instinctively, now that he is on the ground of

the beast, he has assumed the anxious, furtive gait of a beast. He slinks forward with his long back arched, his neck sunk between his shoulders, his head pushed forward; his great, dangling arms, reaching down to the ground, are like two paws. Thus a monstrous quadruped shadow accompanies him, bounding along at his side.

Ever and ever, he utters his rhythmic, singing cry. Sometimes his step strikes the gait of a dance; then his voice echoes through the air, shriller and more joyous.



As they pass through the cut of the rocks, Mauras once again cries "Hep!" and stops Jaume.

"Hark!"

"Ay, for the last few moments, I've also . . ."

"On the left?"

"Ay, on the left."

"Strange! It's over towards La Mort d'Imbert. Who can it be?"

"How do I know?"

Indeed, they hear footsteps on the slope of the hill, as though someone were walking along above them on a parallel trail. Stones came rolling down on them. Ahead, Gagou slinks on. They resume their march, slowly, their ears pricked up, all expectancy.

"Them feet know their way, I tell ye."

"Can't ye make nought out?" Jaume asks. "Yer eyes are better'n mine."

Maurras sees nothing but he hangs back, holding Jaume by the arm.

"Let's go back, Jaume. But for the pair of us

and Gagou, who can be travellin' over the wastes to the village by night? I ask ye: who? Unless . . . Ye know yerself it's no idle tale, but since the cholera, there've been doin's up there that it's best not to go into. Ye saw the shepherd from Les Campas when thêy brought 'un in on the hurdle? Ye saw 'un yourself? That 'un never died a natural death. Ye saw his eyes, eh? And his neck, all twisted up like the rope of a well?"

For a moment Jaume stands stock-still, wordless. Maurras' voice prolongs its life, has its being within him. He, too, saw the dead shepherd, the twenty sheep dead, and the dog, dead, and the torrents of flies swirling down the deserted street.

He speaks tremulously, under his breath:

"I know, César, but the *water!*"



That word settles it so far as he and Maurras are concerned. Water, evoked and visioned, urges them forward. The night, grown cooler, touches their cheeks as with a promise; before them rises the great body of Lure, mother of waters, the mountain that holds all water in the darkness of its porous flesh. In the depths of the air, the flute of a spring trembles; from amid the grasses, a great flat rock glimmers like an eye of water. Moonlight pours down from the heights of the sky, gushes forth in clouds of white dust; and swimming beneath it, like a fish, the shadow of Gagou.

“D’ye hear it again?”

“No. ’Twar likely some lad from Villemus on his way home.”

“Ay, let’s hope so.

“The path to Grandes Aires runs by thereabouts; maybe ’twar someone from up yonder takin’ the

short-cut back. 'Twar market-day at Manosque yesterday."

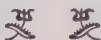
"Maybe some ribbon merchant, maybe. . . .
Ye can never tell. . . ."

"Ay, maybe 'twar. . . ."



And there, a few steps ahead of them, lies the skeleton of the village. Nothing of it remains save a heap of broken bones over which the wind rages, tempestuous. The long stream of air roars through the empty houses. The dead bones shine under the moon.

In the very heart of the wind, the village lies motionless on the surging tide of the grasses.



Gagou follows a clearly traced path through the nettles. Now he shudders and bounds like a dead leaf, the sport of winds.

Maurras and Jaume stride over the beams and stones cautiously, though not so cautiously as to prevent the cans which they carry slung over their backs from clattering.

“Now’s not the time to be makin’ a noise, my lad,” Jaume says as he stops and throws himself flat on his belly over a heap of rubble. “I think we’ve reached the spot; let’s be leavin’ all this tin-ware under the bush. We can come back and fetch it presently.”

The houses cast a saw-shaped shadow on the street. At long intervals, it looks as though some window has a light in it, but no—it merely faces the moon more directly. This same chill light fills the cricketless hearths; it etches shadows that look

like hooded men who stand watch over the rooms, with their soil flooring cracked, amid the springing welter of nettles and hawthorns.

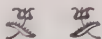
A barn, virtually intact, with a rounded door; it is overcrammed with straw, which sticks out in places. It is along here, to the right, that on a day of storm the shepherd of Les Campas turned aside to cross the valley with his flock and dog, all of them together, precisely where Maurras and Jaume turned to the left.

With one jump, Gagou disappears.

Jaume, his nose in the air, sniffs for a long time.

"I can smell water."

Of a sudden, as they reach the crest of the hilly street, they see . . .



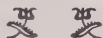
It is the town-square.

The fronts of the houses still stand upright. A balcony, awry, sports a fragment of rope and a poster bearing the legend *Republican Club*. The grass sprouts between the cobble-stones. A ruffled mulberry tree coos in the pale hand of the moon.

In the centre of the square, an old fountain offers its expanse of belly. Except for the Mountain of Lure and the trees, it is undoubtedly the oldest thing in the region. Its rim is all worn away by the rubbing of snaffles; a pillar, bearing the bronze spouts, rises from the round basin. Four cherubs with marble cheeks, their mouths rounded about the pipes, blow. Yet no water flows.

But the basin is full of clear water; its wealth streams on the pavements; the force of its flow has torn up the pavement; out of it, great masses of huge shave-grass have sprung up. Ah, that great pillar rising from the basin! It is a living, breath-

ing creature; it looks like a man trembling under a cloak. The spring sweats all along it in the moss. The only dry objects around are the four marble faces that stare at the dead houses.



Gagou pounces on the water. He churns it with the mill of his arms and it froths about him. It flows over him, with a rush; through his hair, over the fuzz on his chest, against his thin back; it makes a swishing sound as it streams down his canvas trousers.

Gagou drinks. . . .

With arms outspread, he embraces the bowl of the overflowing basin; he glues his mouth to a crack on its edge; as he laps it up, at every throat-

ful, he gurgles with delight, like a little child at breast.



The two men watch this insane joy; their own is more orderly. It blossoms within their brains like a great sun-flower.

“We’ll be havin’ to clean out the basin,” Jaume whispers.

“And link up the pipe,” Maurras adds.

“We’ll take turns fetchin’ the water down in cans,” says Jaume.

“Ay, we’ll take turns, like in the Army,” says Maurras.

They stand there, in the shadow, like twin saints in the hollow of a niche. At the breath of their

alternate utterance, the flower of their joy opens out, wider than the sun.

"I'll fetch the cans," Jaume says.



"After all," Maurras declares as he draws his glass of absinthe towards him, "it's better that Jaume warn't seein' what I seen!"

He drinks. Gondran takes advantage of the interval to drink, too; he would not have wished to interrupt the thread of the story.

"From there, it's a matter of maybe a quarter of an hour to get to the mulberry-tree and back. At the time, the moon war shinin' full on the square; 'twar almost like daylight. Between the square where the club war and the baker's, there's

a little street runs straight as an arrow. The moon drowned it in light; looked like a bar of brand-new silver, so it did. No sooner Jaume gone, I seen a dark shape comin' down from the end of the street, a dark, tall shape, and so slender that at first I thought I war dreamin'. Then it grew bigger, and, suddenly, it stood facin' me, no more'n ten yards on the other side of the fountain. I stood there for a moment, ye know, for there war a great thumpin' under my shirt . . . The tall thing yonder war lookin' straight at Gagou. Bit by bit, I war sayin' to myself: 'Eh, but César, that's Ulalie, that is!' God's truth, it certainly looked like it war Ulalie and no other!

"Then, suddenly, God rot my tongue if she didn't whistle and if our Gagou didn't lift his nose, ay, an' spring to attention, like at the word of command. Up goes his head, 'e sees her and runs straight up to her. They must have been used to it;

'twar all jog-trot, ship-shape, and ruled like music-paper. . . .

“So she rests her gun against the wall. . . .



Maurras is silent. He looks about him suspiciously. He and Gondran are quite alone in the kitchen, with Jadet sleeping, open-eyed. Jadet doesn't matter, of course; but the door to the bedroom is ajar and they can hear Marguerite beating her mattresses. Maurras winks:

“Go and give the door a push, mate!”

Gondran comes back, sits down.



“. . . Well, she rests her gun against the wall. Then she lies down, trusses up her dress, spreads

her skirts and there's that hound of a Gagou on top of her."

"What! Gagou!" Gondran exclaims, stupefied. He strikes the table with his fist. "No, I don't believe it!"

"God's truth, just as I've told ye. From where I stood, I seen it quite clearly: Gagou sprawlin' atop of her, like at rifle-practice. Ay, all that must have started a good time ago, I'll wager."

Maurras savors Gondran's amazement with relish. He watches the other as he plays clumsily with the tremendous news.

"Between yerself and me," Maurras goes on, "Jaume's daughter's old, she's ugly as sin, she's anythin' ye'd care to name her, but her flesh's a woman's, isn't it? She's a woman like the rest, huh? 'Course ye'd have to have served with the troops in Africa to go with her . . . Well, she done the best she could. . . ."

"I'm not arguin' the point," Gondran grumbles. "I'm not arguin'—but with Gagou! Somethin' cruel queer must have driven the girl to 'un. . . . What did ye do next, Maurras?"

"I watched 'em wrigglin' up and down for a spell, then I thought 'twar better to shoo 'em off afore Jaume come back, so I fired in the air. When Jaume turned up, I told 'un I shot to scare Gagou off, but between me and yerself, Gondran, between the two of us, I say—well, strikes me Jaume's got no call to be puttin' on airs . . ."



Gondran was the first to go to the dead village to fetch water for all of them. He drove over in broad daylight with his cart and mule. He brought back five great jars of it.

Jaume drew up the list of names alphabetically:

ARBAUD
GONDRAN
JAUME
MAURRAS

and nailed it up on the trunk of the oak. Thus no argument was possible; when a man's turn came, off he went. Nevertheless, Gondran went first because Arbaud didn't look up to it today: Marie, the eldest of his little daughters, has taken sick.

For two days she has been shivering in spite of the stagnant, oppressive heat. She must have drunk a bellyful of the cistern water which is used for the animals alone. It hit her the other night; already her cheeks are hollow. She runs her tongue over her cracked lips to moisten them but at once fever parches them again. Great hollows bruise her glittering eyes.

This morning she began to sweat; they had to

change the sheets of her bed. She was all sticky with sweat.

Babette stands by her bedside, weeping and crying: "My child, my child, my child!" ceaselessly, as though to convince Fate how unjust it is to make her child suffer.

Arbaud went off to fetch Jaume; the latter came with his book, an Almanach, covered with butcher's paper.

This book has assumed a vast importance because of Jaume's tireless repetition:

"Bought 'un the year I got married, so I did; I'd been coveting 'un three whole years."

Jaume turns the pages, runs his finger down the columns of figures in the index.

"Here it is, d'ye see?"

He pushes the page on which the instructions are printed under Arbaud's nose.

"That's it right enough, mark! There it be!"

Both of them read, spelling out the words as they do; from time to time, Jaume raises his head and stares at the ceiling, as though puzzling out the meaning of the phrase.

“Well, what’s up?” Arbaud asks. “Is it serious?”

“No, can’t ye see, it’s written out there. Doctor would saddle ye with fifteen francs worth of drugs and dietin’ and damn all; feed ye up to the eyes, so ’e would. This book’s Poor Man’s Doctor and a stern doctor, too, ye can take my word for it. Let’s have a look at what it says. ‘*Borage-tea.*’ Hm! Got any borage?”

“Ay, we have,” Babette puts in.

“*. . . toast a piece of bread, dip it into sweet wine and apply it to the soles of the patient’s feet . . . That’s not difficult . . . “Hot pledget”—that’s a compress—“a hot pledget is a compress . . . soaked in brandy and saturated in incense*

smoke . . . Put a hot pledget on her, too. Look here, I'll write it all down on this bit of paper. If ye disremember it, come an' see me: I've the book."

"Then ye're certain sure it's nought?" Babette asks, as she accompanies Jaume to the threshold. "Ye're certain sure . . . ?"

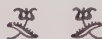
"Never ye fear . . . I'm positive . . . isn't it all written down here . . . ?"

With the palm of his hand, he taps the book to bear witness to the truth of his statement.



Babette returns to the room.

"We'll have to buy one of them books for ourselves," she says.



Despite the hot pledget and the borage-brews, Marie is still ill. Her little hands are like porcelain. She stares out from the depths of herself. The fire that consumes her can be seen, through her skin, blazing about her bones. She lies flat on her back, cadaverous as a Christ. She cannot even raise a hand to brush off the flies that settle upon her; she suffers them to walk with impunity over her face; only when they come near her eye, her eyelids flicker.

Babette, red-eyed, struggles beside her. She has appropriated every box of simples, every package of dry herbs folded up in bits of newspaper: camomille, mallow, sage, thyme, hyssop, agrimony, borage, artemys . . .

She opens all these packages and spreads them out on the table. The health of her daughter lies in these plants; on the stove, water is already sing-

ing in the kettle. Suffice to throw the proper herb into this water and tomorrow Marie would recover. Babette looks for the proper herb. The papers on the table rustle like ripe wheat in the wind.



Jaume is afraid.

Ever since that morning when he found himself at their head, Jaume has been struggling, under the sign of hope. He was like the spring of a mechanism; a blow received thrust him forward. But this evening, suddenly, he met the torrent of despair on his path; now its furious waters sweep him headlong.

Jaume is afraid. He is no longer convinced that

they are destined to conquer in this struggle against the malevolence of the hills. Doubt rises within him, thorny as a thistle.

The blow came from Maurras. A few minutes ago, Jaume told the other:

"It's yer turn to fetch up water tomorrow, César."

And César answered:

"No!"

This is the first time anyone has refused.

"I'll go when I please," Maurras said. "When I please, d'ye hear me? Who are ye to order me about? Do I owe ye somethin'? 'Cause if I do, I'll thank ye to tell me and I'll be payin' ye back. But if I don't owe ye nought, then to hell with yerself and yer orders! We're not a lot of children; we know what's what!"

"But I thought we agreed . . ."

"We didn't agree at all. Ye drew up the list by

yerself, didn't ye? By what right? Who d'ye think ye be, hereabouts: the Pope?"

"All right, never mind, I'll go," Jaume said. "I'll go in yer stead."

And Maurras, as he moved off, turned on his heel:

"Send Ulalie," he called, "she knows the way. . . ."



Things cannot possibly go on in this strain any longer. With a leader, they still stood a chance; especially when the leader knows. . . .

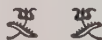
A doubt grips Jaume's heart. Does he really know?

"Am I of a size to cope with the anger of the hills? I do my best—but that's all! I had 'em

mount guard; but misfortune slipped in between 'em, all the same. It flew over the heads of us, chose whom it willed, did as it pleased, without so much as a by-ye-leave. First the spring . . . Marie . . .

“It’s always hoverin’ about us, I feel it movin’ about in the shadow; through the darkness of the night, I can hear the beatin’ of its giant wings. Hoverin’ over us, lyin’ in wait . . .

“Who’ll it be next?”



All night long, Jaume lay weltering in a mire of hope. In the morning, he has but one thought: to see Jadet. Jadet must know the secret.

And day rose.



Marguerite, exhausted by her hourly dance around Jadet's bedside, totters about on swollen legs. When Jaume enters, she is sound asleep where she stands, in front of the open sideboard, without knowing what she had gone to fetch.

"Marguerite, go to bed, if ye like," Jaume says. "I'm here. Make the most of it; I'll stay by yer father a while."



No sooner were they alone, than Jadet spoke up. It was as though, a long time ago, through the walls, he had sensed Jaume's coming.

"Ye'll need to stay here until nightfall if ye're wishin' to tell all of it."

"Jadet, it's no joke this time, hark to me care-
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fully. I didn't dare speak to ye of it afore, but I've got to now. If ye're willin', ye can save us all. Listen: I seen the cat!"

Jadet is fashioned of dead wood; he is unable even to shudder now; suddenly his eyelids close. Then he lifts them again; his glance seeks out Jaume:

"Turn my head around, I can't see ye well. For what we've to tell, we must see each other clearly."

Jaume takes Jadet's head and gently turns it towards him.

"There. You saw 'un. When?"

"Three weeks ago."

"And ye've come to tell me now?"

"I reckon I could head the thing off, the way they say yerself did once; but I'm afraid it won't work now. . . ."

"Did ye count the teeth of the hills?"

"The teeth?"

"Did ye look to see if their hair's bristlin' or slopin' a mite in the tide of the wind?"

". . . ?"

"Did ye squint?"

". . . ?"

"Did ye see the nest of the whorlbird behind the hillock of Espel, there where there's nought but burnt junipers, and himself that scorches 'em with his fiery breath."

Jaume wonders if this man, speaking to him now, can be the same as the man of a few moments ago. It is: the same eye, the same mouth, discolored with tobacco juice.

"No, I done nought of all that."

"What've ye done, then?"

"Well, Jadet, I had 'em to guard the paths, so as if evil beasts come, maybe . . . Then, while they war watchin', somethin' wounded the spring,

and it died. I searched for the water: rummaged the earth, so I did, and then my own head. In the end, we found some in the village up yonder, ye know where I mean? Now Arbaud's daughter's took sick. It's some uncanny ill my book knows nought of, and she's thinnin' out, bit by bit, till she's no heavier'n a wee pigeon now. She can barely open her lips to say 'Mother.' Ah, she's a pitiful sight!

"And worst of all is that it's begun to fasten on the brains of 'em. Already, Maurras . . . It's begun to fasten on the brain, where no man can see nought, where the evil works its havoc without revealin' nought, nor color nor hump, smoother'n oil.

"So long as we stick together, we can win; it's hard to break up a bundle. But if we all go every which way, each for himself, gropin' in the dark, without knowin', first one this way, then the other

that, it'll be the end of us. I'm afraid for Les Bastides."

"Ye bloody gowk, ye!"

"But . . ."

"A bloody gowk I said. And that's the kind of man wants to be a leader, eh? So ye seen the cat, eh? Ye seen the cat? Fine! And ye posted the men on the paths?"

Jadet laughs. His mouth opens, cracks like a cleft in a log of wood.

"And ye expect me not to call ye a bloody gowk?"

His voice grows lower, hoarser. He is made of stone. Not an eyelid flickers. He is like a hollow stone through which a gust of wind is blowing.

"Ye're friggled proper, the whole lot of ye!"

"Don't say that, Jadet. Sounds as though ye were glad of it."

"I am glad of it, serves ye right! There's al-

ways too many cods like yerself in the world!"

"What's the matter? Have ye ought against any one of us?"

"The whole blarsted pack of ye!"

"Who's ever done ought against ye?"

"Ye're always there, before my eyes, with yer legs that move and yer arms like branches and yer bellies taut. And ye never one of ye even thought to give me a little of the life that's in ye. Just a mite, I warn't askin' for much, just enough to fill my pipe with and go and sit me down under the tree."

"Ye know well that can't be done, Jadet. 'Tisn't right ye should be holdin' that against us. And then, ye should be mindful of Les Bastides, eh? That small parcel of earth which is ours; them houses where we live out our days, good or evil; yer own daughter, Jadet, and Gondran, who makes yer absinthe for ye to yer own taste."

“ ‘E’s not given me a drop since I took sick.”

“And Arbaud’s children, those wee girls just beginnin’ to sprout to life, and Babette, come from Pertuis to stay with us and never gave up. All that’s not ready for death yet, it’s not ready.”

“I’m good an’ ready.”

“And yer fields, Jadet, them parcels of light earth in the trees, yer olives, and yer fine great melons? Won’t ye think of all them things for a little? D’ye want all that to turn to wild grass again?”

“All that up my backside! I go on ahead, all that’s behind me. An’ I won’t be needin’ it where I’m goin’!”

“That’s selfish, Jadet!”

“What in hellfire do I care? And I’ll tell ye again: the game’s up. Ye can’t last out another month. And ye know well that when I says a thing, it’s true.

“Ye remember yer wife, eh? I’d warned ye, had I not? Ye seen her yerself, danglin’ down from the rafter, huh? And yer daughter that gets herself friggled by the driveller. . . .”

Jaume leaps to his feet. His chair clatters to the floor. He seizes Jadet by the neck.

“As fer yerself,” he says—the words grate through his clenched teeth—“that’s enough of yer wickedness. Ye’re worse ’n a wolf. Ye know quite well there’s none must say a word of my wife, least of all yerself. . . . Nor of my daughter. . . . If ye were up, I’d plant my fist in yer foul mug! Don’t ye be drivin’ me to it. . . .”

Jaume calms down, draws a deep breath, turns towards the room, where Marguerite is sleeping, and listens. Then he picks up his chair and sits down. He is once again master of himself.

Jadet lies as one dead. Yet his laughter sounds faintly, nibbling away at the silence.

“I didn’t come to quarrel with ye, Jadet. Ye can see, I’m quiet now. It’s not myself alone runs a risk, but the lot of us. Remember that. If ye know what’s to do, tell us.”



“Very well, I’ll tell ye. It’s not easy: it’s out of joint, ye might say. Ye must be seein’ things from a great height, as ye might from the top of a tree and all the earth spread out below ye.”

Jadet pants: the slight panting of a bird. He has closed his eyes. He looks deep within himself; he peers down at the cavern of his chest, in which so many things have accumulated during eighty years of living.

And, of a sudden, it all came unstopped, it

flowed out, clear, then thick, then clear again, lees and wine mingled, as though the bung of some forgotten barrel had burst.

“Ye want to learn what to do and ye don’t even know the world ye live in. Ye grasp that somethin’s against ye and ye don’t know what. That’s all because ye’ve looked everywhere about ye without takin’ stock of things. I’ll wager ye’ve never even thought of the great power?

“The great power of beast and plant and stone.

“Earth warn’t made for yerself, for yer own personal use, now and forever, without yer takin’ counsel of the master from time to time. Ye’re like a tenant; ye mustn’t forget the landlord. The boss, clad in a smart six-button jacket, with a waistcoat of maroon velvet and a topcoat made of fine sheepskin. D’ye know the boss? D’ye know ’un?

“Ye’ve never heard a windlike hootin’ over the

leaf and leaflet, the little leaf and leafkin and the whole gay-dappled apple-tree, have ye? That be the gentle voice of 'un; 'e speaks like that to tree and beast. 'E's father of everythin'; the blood of everythin' runs through his veins.

"'E takes the breathless rabbits in his hands:

"'Ha, my fine rabbit,' says 'e, 'ye're wringin' wet, yer eye's turnin', and yer ear's bloody, heh? So ye've been runnin' for yer skin, eh? Snuggle down here between my legs; don't be afraid, there, ye're in clover.'

"The sweet clover . . . bitter-sweet . . . and the brook. . . .

"Then it's the dogs come runnin' up.

"When ye say: 'My dog's huntin' on his own,' what's up is 'e's given ye the slip and run off to the boss. That smart six-button jacket and the balloon of the small bell on the sheep's neck!

"And, under the shelter of his legs, dog and

rabbit make friends, snout to snout, hair against hair. The wee rabbit sniffs at yer dog's ear; yer dog wiggles his ear because the rabbit's blown into it, and 'e looks about 'un and seems to be sayin': 'It's no fault of mine that I had to chase after 'un all day long through the junipers and plowed land, over the holes in the brook with strings of grasses in the depths of 'em that snarl ye up hand and foot.'

"Then everythin' else follows after: turtle-dove, fox, snake, lizard and field-mouse, grasshopper, rat, weasel and spider, moor-hen and magpie, everythin' that can walk or run; the roads look like rivers of beasts, and all of 'em singin' and leapin' like a brook and flowin' on and rubbin' against the sides of the road and takin' clumps of earth along with 'em and carryin' along whole torn branches of hawthorn with 'em. . . . And the

whole multitude comes to 'un for 'e's the father of caresses. 'E's a word for each:

“*‘Turt, turtle, turtle-dove, love, Raynard, nard, hard . . .’* says 'e as 'e pulls tufts of hair out of 'un.

“*‘Brek, kex, frog in a bog, lizard's gizzard, mouse and rat, rat-tat-tat. . . .’*

“Then 'e goes around for a stroll among the trees. And it's the same thing with the trees; they know 'un, they're not afraid. Trouble with yer-self, Jaume, is that ye never seen trees save they distrust ye; truth to tell, ye don't really know what a tree be. An' the trees're happy with 'un as they war durin' the first days of the world, afore ever their first branch war cut off.

“*. . .* There war a wood and no sound yet of axe, nor of prunin'-bill, nor of knife on the knap, never a blade in the glade—no, 'twar the wood on the hill and never the axe.

“So old Sheepskin Coat goes strollin’ by, and the linden plays the little mewin’ kitten and plane tree cracks inside of ’un like a man beggin’ after alms. ’E sees their wounds, their knife-scars and axe-clefts and ’e comforts ’em. ’E speaks to the linden and plane tree, to bay tree and olive tree, to field poppy, Summer savory and plantain, ay, and to the pomegranate, for his pity, himself bein’ the master and they lovin’ and obeyin’ him. And if ’e be minded to wipe out Les Bastides from the tip of the hunch of the hills, after man’s been workin’ excess of evil, ’e’s not needin’ to do much, nor even to show himself to the barstards; sufficient ’e blow a whit into the air of day and the trick’s done.

“’E holds the great power in the hollow of his hand: beast, plant, stone!

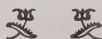
“It’s a strong thing, a tree is; one hundred years

it's been spendin', busy pushin' back the weight of heaven with a twisted branch.

"And a beast's strong, too. In especial, the wee ones. They sleep all alone in a grassy hollow, so they do, all alone in the world. And it's stout of heart they be: they never cry when ye kill 'em, but only look ye square in the eye: they pierce ye through the eye with the needles of their own eyes. Trouble with yerself, Jaume, is that ye haven't looked at dyin' beasts enough.

"And a stone's strong too, one of them great stones that cleave the wind—a stone that's been straight for—who'll know?—a thousand years, maybe. One of them stones that have always been on earth, before yerself, Jaume, and the apple, before the olive and myself, before the woods and the beasts for that matter, and before the fathers of it all—of yerself, me and the apple—before

even the father of *all* that, Jaume, was in *his* father's cod-piece, even! One of them stones that seen the first day of creation and that's endured always the same, changeless, time out of mind. That's what ye should be knowin' if ye're wishin' to find a balm to yer troubles. . . ."



Jaume listens. He feels the world swaying under his feet like the flooring of a boat. His head is teeming with pictures of earth: he sees trees, plants, beasts, from grasshopper to boar. For him it all spells a substantial earth over which he travels along moveless furrows. But now . . . ?

Certain it is that he would never have believed Jadet so clever; it is the vision of this power that

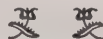
frightens him at first. This time, a man has spoken who knows. Ay, the man knows, he truly knows; and everything that was dark is illumined, things they could not understand are explained. But what Jadet has brought to light is terrible.

It was all so simple, after the old fashion: man, and, everywhere about him, yet under him, beast and plant. Things worked well that way: you kill a hare, you pick a fruit; a peach is sugary juice in your mouth, a hare is a great dish piled high with black meat. Afterwards, you wipe your lips and smoke a pipe on the doorstep. It was simple but it left many things in the dark. Now they will have to live with what is henceforth irremediably clear; and that is cruel. It is cruel because the order of man, supreme, with all else under him, no longer exists; instead, there is a vast evil power and far below it, man, indistinct from beast and tree.

Jaume feels the hill, alive and terrible, budge under his feet.



I'll tell ye the secret. . . ."



Jaume would prefer Jadet not to speak now.

"I'll tell ye the secret; it's rich and high as a corpse. Ye see, it's this: there's excess of blood around us.

"There's ten holes and a hundred holes in all the flesh and livin' wood through which blood and

sap flow over the world like a River Durance. There's a hundred holes, a thousand holes we ourselves've made, even with the hands of us. And the master hasn't enough spittle nor speech to cure them. . . .

"For, when all's said and done, them beasts and them trees are his; they belong to the boss. His sheepskin coat, the sheep gave it 'un, without no man skinnin' them nor their bleedin', just easy-like; and each button of mutton-bone without bleedin', easy-like; the bones of buttons for 'un to keep, of mutton, of sheep. . . .

"Yerself and I—we belong to 'un, too; trouble is in all them years we've forgotten the path that leads up to his knees. We've tried to make ourselves whole, to find a solace, all alone; what we should do is find that path again. We should find it under the dead leaves: there's leaves litterin' the path and ye must raise 'em with yer hand, first one,

then the other, one by one, very gently, for fear the moon burn it, for fear the moon burn the little path that skips like a skippin' goat under the moonlight.

"And when we're quite close to 'un, in the runnels of his spittle and in the wind of his speech, 'e'll say to us:

"'Ha, my fine little mannikin with yer brave fingers that seize and squeeze, come here, my lad, this way, let's have a look if ye remember how to caress with yer hands, that's what I taught ye in the very beginnin' when yerself was sittin' on my knee, a little shaver with yer mouth full of my milk . . .'"

Suddenly the great vision grows blurred:

". . . milk . . . yer mou . . . mouth . . . full . . . mouth . . . drouth . . . full . . . wool . . . silk . . . milk, milk, milk . . ."

And his throat rattles, rasps the air like the

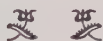
sound of brakes on a cart headed downhill. Jaime leaps towards the bed.

Jadet has stretched himself out, buried his head in the pillow. A dark liquid spouts from the depths of his open mouth. What if Jadet were to die? . . .

“Jadet, eh, Jadet, heh there!”

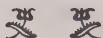
The eye, already fixed beyond the light of day, returns, trembles like a periwinkle in the wind; he grows firmer, his tongue turns:

“. . . milk, yer mouth full of milk and no blood on yer hands yet . . . no blood . . .”



The sound of Marguerite's snoring breaks the silence.

"It's finished," Jadet says. "Calm down, take it easy."



In the dead village where he went for water, Jaume found a comb: one of those tortoise-shell combs women bury in a knot. He found it under the mulberry-tree, in a spot where the grass lay flattened out as though someone were accustomed to lie there. Certain words of Jadet's came back to his memory, and Maurras' allusion, too. He put the comb in his pocket.

Having reached home, before even unharnessing the mule, he made straight for his daughter's room; he left the comb on the chest of drawers, between the globe of the clock and the small reed basket filled with buttons.

Jaume's glance scans the room as though expecting it to reveal the secret life of his daughter. He notes her petticoats hanging on the wall, an old corset tossed on a chair, a shoe-lace on the bedside-rug. One drawer of the chest is half-open; the yellow corner of a crude shirt peeps out. A pair of woman's drawers is spread out on the head of the bed; a great oval slit yawns between the legs of gray flannel. A copy of *The Shamed Virgin* lies on the night-table.

The comb is placed to advantage; it is easily visible.

This morning Ulalie did her hair before the mirror and quite naturally planted the comb in it. But, on her way to the meadow, she stopped in the hollow path, in a thoroughly hidden spot. She took the comb out, looked at it, front and back, turned it between her fingers. Then she stood stock-still for a long time, waiting for her thought

to come back from where she had just despatched it.

Ulalie returns home. Jaume's glance flies obliquely towards the comb. The comb is in its usual place.

"War it yerself, father, left me this?" she asks, drawing the comb from her hair.

"What?"

"This comb."

"That comb? No—why should ye be believin' I—"

"I don't know; 'twar on my chest of drawers. It's not mine."

"Throw it away if it's not yer own!"

"Ye can be sure I shall do. What if happened to belong to an ill person? I wonder who could have put 'un on my chest of drawers. I warn't takin' heed this mornin', as I did my hair. I war thinkin' of somethin' else . . ."

And Ulalie threw the comb out of the window.



At noon, today, it seemed as though done intentionally. They all stood in the square, each ready to go his own way—for now they have split up—and suddenly, there was a noise like a leaf swept along the ground by the wind. They turned, to a man: it was the cat.

He was crossing the little square, quite calmly, taking his time. He moved forward towards Gondran's house. Through the open door of the kitchen, they could see Jadet's bed and, in the middle of the bed, the hump which is Jadet's body.

The cat rounds his back into a ball, jumps on the window-ledge and goes in.



This apparition of the cat united them again in their fear.

Since the brief quarrel between Jaume and Maurras, the four men had been living completely detached from each other. Maurras went after his own water, the others followed suit, each for himself, separately. Each set out alone along the paths of the mountain; the load he brought back went into one house only. When his container was empty, none asked water of his neighbor, each preferring to set out on the paths of the mountain. Yet this selfishness, by isolating them, restored in them their care of the earth, disjoined them from the great fear. They were actually on the point of a new life.

Arbaud went off to look at the abandoned wheat-fields: the heads of wheat, overweighted, bent down the stalks, the thistles spurted up through this yellow felt. Patiently with his sickle, he cut

it down and gathered it in bundles, glad of life in the open, away from Babette's groans and the ghastly sight of little Marie's body.

Gondran, far from Jadet, picked a basket of grapes in his vineyard. There, too, the whole place was one vast republic of wasps, field-mice and pillaging birds.

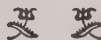
Jaume, for his part, straightened out his plow-share on the rustic forge; the swing of his arm and the cadence of the hammer blows gradually lulled his suspicions to sleep.

Maurras, far from Jaume, ate figs:

"Tomorrow," he thought, "I'll say to 'un; 'Let's be makin' up, Jaume. I'm a trifle testy, I'll allow, and it's all over now, I'll go and fetch water for the lot of us.' "

Ay, they were on the point of a new life; very little more was needed. Then the cat appeared. He came out of the mulberry-bush, he walked in the

sunlight, he jumped on Jadet's window-sill, it lasted no more than five minutes in all, from beginning to end, but, at once, earth and air took on an evil look.



The cat reappears. From the window, he jumps on the fig tree; the fig tree raises him to the roof. He walks over the tiles. He makes for Maurras's house.

And fear bound Maurras violently to the others again. He touched Jaume's arm.

"Shall I shoot 'un down!"

At the same time, he slipped his gun-strap off his shoulder.

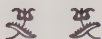
“No, leave ’un, anythin’ sooner ’n that.”

Maurras obeyed.



Henceforth, they are all bound together, to the bitter end. The heads of the wheat will fall, one by one, through the felt of the stems, down to earth and the ants; magpies will eat the grapes and figs; the plowshare will rust in the autumn rain.

Now they form a single great body which is afraid.



The cat returned two or three times.

He always comes out of the mulberry bush; he

walks on the tips of his claws, his legs taut, his head high; he passes by without seeing the men. Or he approaches, undulating; his whiskers palp the air, his pointed ears search for noise in the silence. Or else again, when they are bolted in at home, they see him appearing suddenly on the window-sill.

This was what happened to Madelon Maurras. She had gone to fetch some potatoes from the attic. She was choosing some from the heap and putting them in her apron. She was not working quickly. When a woman is old . . .

Everyone knows, of course, what an attic is. It is filled with things as good as dead: old wardrobes, broken to pieces; worn-out shoes; trunks that have served their time, in a word, things that have been put there to let them die by themselves. When you see them again, they look as though

they reproached you for it; it is always rather melancholy.

And then, on that occasion, the weather was overcast. She heard the plaster on the wall crack; she raised her head; the cat was perched on the edge of the skylight. He was licking his paw and washing his ear.

Madelon let her potatoes fall, and scurried away to the kitchen quickly, quickly, fast as her old legs could carry her. There she drank a great draught of water to get her breath back and calm herself.



Gagou alone does not look frightened; when the cat passes, he laughs, baring his long horse-teeth; he thrusts forward his puckered nose, his hanging

lips, towards the beast, crying: "Ga, gou, ga, gou," gently, lovingly, with such application and tenderness that his silky slobber twists, eel-like, under his chin. Yet he, too, is harassed by something . . . something . . .

At the fall of night, he comes out and prowls around the barricaded houses. For the first time, he abandons his usual cry; it is a soft whine that escapes from between his closed lips. It is like the plaint of a lost dog, calling its master.

He peers up at the windows behind which the good people are retiring for the night. The shadows of the women, dressed only in their chemises, their hair unloosed, pass across the windows. The lamps go out.

Gagou, motionless, waits in the night.



This evening, at precisely that hour after night-fall when the eye is not yet used to the darkness, little Marie had convulsions. It all happened suddenly; her mother heard her gnash her teeth; she touched her, felt how cold she was and felt the great waves hurtling through her, making her very bones cry out.

Babette howls. Arbaud gropes through the shadow, looking for the lamp. At last he has it. But the glass slips over the tablecloth; Arbaud catches it as it is about to roll over. He shuffles about, looking for matches. No matches, anywhere! Oh, but yes, here they are, here they are! He strikes them so hard that they fail to ignite. They simply streak the night with a blue line.

Marie's bones crack audibly. Babette moans:

"Her head, Aphrodis, oh, her head!"

At last, the lamp.

The child lies pillowed in her mother's arms.

When Arbaud last saw them, it was in the half-darkness of the dying day; as he sees them now, under the lamp, they are unrecognizable. Babette is two round eyes, insane eyes, and a black hole like the mouth of a spring, out of which a plaint flows endlessly. . . . Marie—but can it be Marie she holds in her arms? Or is it a great knotted briar-root, coiling and writhing, very slowly, as in a brazier? Numb, thin hands clutch at the shadows.

Two sounds only above the silence: Arbaud's labored breathing and the lyric song of the lamp, burning away. Babette, all mouth, kisses the briar-root . . . fiercely . . . lost. . . .



They laid her on her parents' wide bed.
"Undo her legs! Gently!"

"Rub vinegar on her."

"Where's the vinegar?"

"There, on the mantel."

"'Tisn't there."

"'Tis so, I tell ye."

"'Tisn't on the mantel . . ."

"'Tis so . . ."

"Ay, here it be . . . here it be . . ."

They bustle about around the bed, jostle one another, break away, huddle to, stretch suppliant hands towards Marie, and moan. They undress her. The father struggles to unbutton her little shirt; the dainty mother-of-pearl button slips from under his fingers, eludes his grasp, turns up again, plays, dances, swims before his eyes. With one wrench, Arbaud rips the shirt open from top to bottom. The pathetic, small body lies bare. In Babette's breast, a storm bursts.

Her child, her own: Marie. Fresh as a pink, she

was, and rosy, a rose, the fairest rose in the garden. And now: this! She has become this lifeless thing they are handling, this dead bundle they tossed on the counterpane of their great bed.

The lamp sings.

Into the yellow, tragic skin, they rub the vinegar that smells of lavender and hyssop. The body relaxes; her head sways on her limber neck. The mouth opens; visibly the clenched teeth part. She heaves a sigh. Legs, arms relax. One by one, the tenuous fingers rise, spread, settle into the habitual position of the hand at rest. This is their child again, their Marie, flesh of their flesh, his face and hers, blent, their daughter, returned to them.

"Lay her down in her bed," Arbaud says, "put a hot brick at her feet, it's over now. . . ."

He draws up his long body, takes two steps; his broad hand moves towards the lamp. He turns down the wick.

The lamp is silent.



Suddenly:

“What if it isn’t true,” Jaume thinks. He has striven his utmost to accustom himself to the world as Jadet sees it. But the more he ponders it, the greater his doubt.

“What if it’s a lie, to trick me, to do me in easier?”

He listens to the leisurely, slow life of the trees about him, but that life, even, seems hostile rather than friendly.

Grass, there is, on the little square, tufts of yellow grass, just as on the hill. Ay, the little square is fast growing wild, becoming a part of the hill again, as it was in the past. The path to the plain

is practically barred by a great clematis that fell across it. In normal times, they would have cleared the path again in short order. Slyly, treacherously, the world of tree and grass attacks Les Bastides.

“‘Caress it with yer hands,’ that’s what ’e said, ‘caress it!’ How easy it is! . . . Why, if ye don’t dig with yer spade, if ye don’t wield yer axe, if ye don’t clear a space about ye, if ever ye once let the steel fall from yer hands, the green mob tramples yer feet, runs yer walls riot. Ay, it’s a breeder of dust!”

Jaume raises his head. Across the little square, before his very eyes, a shadow prowls under the sheltering oak-tree. A wild boar at Les Bastides in broad daylight!

The beast barely skims the leaves as it makes for the spring; it sniffs the empty basin and paws the earth.

Jaume’s gun stands there against the wall; he

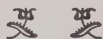
need but stretch his hand. Jaume does not stretch his hand. That is something new, alarming.

The wild boar catches sight of the man. Quietly, it chooses its bed, wallows in the dust. Still the gun stands against the wall. With lowered head and hands clenched tight between his knees, Jaume stares down in front of him as though he had seen nothing. The thought of the gun does not even enter his mind. He is afraid. His fear is in his flesh like a splinter, and all his body, around, aches. He is afraid. That is why he has not reached for the gun. He holds no thought of his man's strength, now; he thinks he is afraid and he withdraws into his fear, hides within it like a nut in its shell.

The wild boar snorts as it rubs its back. It rises, sniffs about circle-wise, gambols clumsily and, at a slow, even trot, disappears into the wood.



It is a fine afternoon. The pebble of the moon rolls over the sands of the heavens. Meanwhile, away towards Pierrevert, a mist rises, an unwonted, reddish mist.



Jaume jumps to his feet. The door yonder, at Gondran's, is open. That white hump under the sheets is Jadet.

“Ha, Jadet, now I know the baseness of yer heart. Ay, yer wickedness looms up before me, straighter 'n a mountain. Ye're on th' other side of the fence with earth and trees and beasts—against us! Ye're a dirty barstard! My wife hanged herself in the barn one night when I war stalkin' hares. Yerself is the man did it! Not with

the hands of ye, surely but with yer tongue, yer bitch of a tongue. The mouth of ye's rotten-sweet with all the sugary juices of evil. . . ."

Jaume draws near. Before the window, a fig tree parts in two twisted branches; he climbs astride this fork. From there he can see into the room.

Jadet lies prone. His gaze speeds through the shadow to the spot where the Post Office calendar hangs. He is muttering in a low voice. Is he alone?

Jadet is not alone. On the bed, close to him: the cat.



Someone is running over the stones of the hill.
Who can it be?

Maurras—with his elbows pressed against his body, his head lowered, what force urges him forward? So hard he pants that they can hear him from Les Bastides. Having reached the little square, he rushes upon Jaume, screaming. But, before he is able to speak, he stands there gesticulating, red in the face, dripping with sweat. As soon as he opens his mouth, he hastens to swallow a great throatful of air which drives back the words within himself. At last:

“Fire, fire!” he manages to utter, stretching his arm towards the hill.

What a few moments ago was a mist has now spread to the whole sky. Through it, the sun stands out round and reddish as an apricot. Jaume’s moustache trembles. He wets his finger, holds it up in the air:

“The wind’s blowin’ from yonder. Quick!”

They rush to their houses, beat upon the doors

with their feet, with their hands, with their shoulders, yelling. . . .



“Hold on, hi, here I be!” Arbaud bellows, as he bounces down the stairs and runs forward, his squat body rolling like a ball. The whole crowd—Gondran, Marguerite, Madelon, the little farmhand, Ulalie—dash out amid a rustle of skirts and corduroy trousers. The color in their eyes, widening, and the abyss of the mouth, gape out of their heads. Babette opens the window of her room.

“What is it? What’s the matter now?”

“Fire . . . fire . . .”

Maurras stamps up and down on one spot between his mother and Gondran:

“ . . . it’s swallowed up the Bois Hospitaliers; beyond, toward Dix Collines, it’s all finished, flat as your hand, not a stick left. When I reached the heights of Espel and I saw that . . . By God, I . . . by God . . . ”

“What about La Garidelle?”

“It’s headed down that way!”

“Gaude?”

“It’s burnin’ up everythin’.”

“Son of a bitch!”



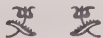
Jaume is somewhat alone. He is somewhat aloof, too, and lonely. He feels himself become great and strong as a tree. At once, his heart is stripped of its terror. He hears it beating, deep within him,

sheer and bare, with its burden of rich blood.

“All right, this time we know where it comes from; we can see what it is, we know what to do. Might have been a lot worse. Here we be, I’m here, ay, it’s all right, it’s all right so long as we know what it is. . . .”



The air is like a syrup of aromatics, at bottom thick with odor and heat.



With one step, Jaume is upon them. His right hand on Maurras’ shoulder, his left hand on Gon-
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dran's, he stands between them like a tree with fine stout boughs.

"Well, we'll all of us be goin' up yonder, eh, mates?

"Arbaud, have 'em fetch yer child to Gondran's, they can put her in the back room. Ulalie, ye'd best be goin' to help Babette. Mère Madelon, go to Gondran's, too. All of ye to Gondran's, off ye go. Don't be separatin' so we can tell where ye be if we should need ye. And if ye all stay together, ye won't be afraid. As for us: Arbaud, yer axe and yer spade; Maurras, fetch yer spade. Ye'd best be takin' yer fork, too. Gondran, yer axe, yer ropes and yer flail. And yerself, lad—ye're comin' along with us. Run to the house, fetch my two axes, the big and the little 'un; they're under the bench.



The women pass by at a run:

“Babette, heh, Babette, look out for the child’s blankets. . . .

“Bring somethin’ to cover yerself with, mother. . . .

“Don’t be standin’ in the way, child, run, quick!”



Windows are flung open:

“Have ye the key to the wardrobe, father?”

“Get on, hurry,” Jaume says.

“The key to the wardrobe, father, the key to the wardrobe?”

“What’s that ye say?”

“The key to the wardrobe?”

“Behind the globe of the clock.”

Doors bang:

"The axes, lad."

"Couldn't find 'em."

"Under the bench, I tell ye, God strike me!"

"Have ye got everythin', Arbaud?"

"I brought my bill, too."

"I've got two picks," Maurras says.

Gondran emerges from Les Monges.

"We've put Marie to bed."

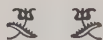
"She didn't cry?"

"What about my mother?"

"By God!" Jaume cries. "Are ye ready or not?"

A flight of birds, dense as a river, rushes past, crying.

Jaume climbs the fig tree. In his room, Jadet lies rigid, tranquil, in the same position. Beside him, the cat combs its coat with little strokes of its claws.



“Jadet, Les Hospitaliers are on fire, d’ye hear me? The wind’s blowin’ up from there. Have ye nought to tell me?”



A silence through which a wave of wind, weighed down by violent essences, snores. Then the voice of Jadet, screaming with all his strength:

“Ye silly barstard!”



It broke out like God’s thunder between two villages yonder, where they were burning potato rubbish.

The huge monster of flame sprang from amid the brush early this morning, on the stroke of three. Then it was in the pine groves, kicking up a devil of a row. At the time, they thought they could quell it without too much damage; but it rushed forward, so fast, so strong, all day long and part of the following night, that it broke down all the lads' arms and numbed their brains with fatigue. At the crack of dawn, it rose before their eyes, blazing away more merrily than ever, coiling its long body among the hills like a torrent. It was too late.

Since then, it has thrust its fiery head through wood and moor, its belly of flame following after. Its tail, behind it, lashes the embers and cinders. It glides, crawls, leaps forward, ever forward. A swoop of its claw to the right, a swoop to the left; here, it guts an oak grove, there, with one gulp of its throat, it devours a score of white oaks and

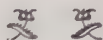
three thickets of pine trees; the dart of its tongue palps the wind to find its direction. It is as though it knew whither it was going.

It was its snout, dripping with blood, that Maurras spied in the valley.



Babette was afraid in the rear room; so they laid down a mattress on the kitchen-floor for Marie and a heap of sacks beside it for mother and sister. Between the door at the rear and the sideboard, they piled up some cloths for Madelon to sleep on.

“Don’t bother about me,” Ulalie told them, “I’ll find some corner for myself all right.”



“Oh, what a crowd!” Marguerite exclaims. “It’s fine, the lot of us together!”

The walls of the room bounce her back to each other at the volley, like a soft ball; she moves back and forth from the wardrobe where the linen is stored, to the sideboard across the room. She would wish to distribute sheets and coffee all at once; she walks about, empty-handed, not knowing where to begin, and she laughs with the great frozen laugh of a picture.

“Help yerselves, help yerselves, I don’t know which way to turn. Babette, take the cups; Ulalie, give ’em sheets, do, take the flowered blanket, under there . . .”



They lit the oil-lamp. Jadet’s bed lifts the old man’s body up to the shadow’s rim of the lamp-shade.

Twice, already, Marguerite said:

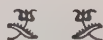
"Come to bed, Ulalie, come here, behind the stove; ye'll be comfortable, there's room aplenty."

"Don't be mindin' me, there's lots of time. I couldn't sleep, what with knowin' they're all out yonder. . . ."

The others, after disposing themselves variously, settled down on mattresses on the ground. Now they lie stretched out, quietly: Babette between her two daughters; Madelon in her corner between the sideboard and the door, fully clad, in her three thicknesses of skirt and her neckerchiefs; Marguerite on the bedside-rug. Marguerite took off her blouse but kept her petticoat and stockings; she lies flat on her back; her heavy breasts, covered with freckles, hang, one to one side, one to the other, their great red tips pointing. Already their breaths sing, heavy and deep, cut by the short gasps which spurt up through the fever on Marie's

parched lips, by the two notes playing in Marguerite's nostrils as she inhales and exhales, by old Madelon's breath as she wheezes like a pipe-smoker. Now and then, through this concert, comes a raucous gurgling, that swells, diminishes and dies away. Jadet breathes with difficulty.

They lowered the wick of the lamp. The light is a yellow ball glued to the iron circles of the candelabra, an isolated, small glow, a ball hung in the middle of the room, that does not even light up the corners. It scarcely grazes the point of Babette's white, pretty nose, one breast of Marguerite's and the fringe of Madelon's petticoat.



Suddenly, in the shadow, the wall lights up, the black shape of a saucepan dances; the window op-

posite is illumined by a huge red dazzling flower.

Ulalie goes to the window:

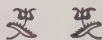
“Les Ubacs have caught fire!” Ulalie murmurs to herself.



Outside, the dark body of the deserted houses, then the hill, touching the belly of the night. The contours are hemmed with russet flames that are even now devouring the wood of Les Ubacs, on the next hump of the hills.

The hill, with its burden of plants and beasts, rises, black, heavy, weighty with immobility and strength.

“What if that hill war to grow angry . . . like the others . . . ?”



The lamp goes down. The ball of light shrinks. Now Babette's nose is no more than a tiny pallid nameless triangle; Marguerite's breast alone is still a breast which rises and falls on two whistling tones.

Through the window, the reflection of the fire carves on the black wood of the room the violent features of Ulalie.



Very gently, quietly, the lamp goes out. Breast and nose are effaced. On the wall, where the saucepans hang, a great reddish spot trembles; in its centre, a small, egg-shaped design lengthens out, is flattened down, presenting the picture of a flaw in the pane, magnified. The reflection of Les

Ubacs on fire streams through the window.

In the hearth, an ember sputters a moment, then dies out.



A cock crows. The oak tree snorts in the wind.
It must be dawn.

A thread of dawn, wan, gray. The clock reads seven; it must surely have stopped.

Marguerite is the first to awake: she sits up on the bedside-rug, on which she has slept, and scratches her belly, long and hard, with her nails. It sounds as though she were clawing a drum. She slips her breasts through the shoulder-straps of her chemise and pushes them back by the handful into the gussets of her corset.

The door opens: Ulalie thrusts her head in; she

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looks embarrassed when she sees Marguerite is awake.

“So ye’re up already?”

“I couldn’t sleep. It’s really caught at Les Ubacs, ye know!”

“Les Ubacs?”

Marguerite repeats: “Les Ubacs?” She is still asleep, standing; she cannot conceive what difference it can make if Les Ubacs are afire.

“What time will it be?”

“Close to half-past seven.”

“Half-past seven. Ye can’t see nought.”

“Les Ubacs are burnin’, that’s why ye can’t see nought: the smoke’s so thick ye can’t see Sainte Roustaigne no longer.”

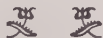
“Good Lord!” Marguerite says in terror. “This time, well—” Then, as though returning to her senses: “I’ll be brewin’ the coffee.”

At the sound of the coffee-pot, Babette

awakes, violently, with a cry and a gesture of defence.

"Oh! What's the matter? . . . I was afraid . . . I can smell somethin' burnin'!"

"It's Les Ubacs," Marguerite says as she passes the coffee. "It's caught on there. . . ."



The door opens with a bang, hurtles against the wall. The women turn round: Jaume stands on the threshold.

Silence. A cup rolls over the table, falls to the ground, breaks into fragments.

"Jaume, Jaume!" Babette says. Ulalie goes forward, touches her father:

"What's the matter?" he asks. "What's wrong with me?"

Jaume's long moustache is burned wholly away on one side; his eyes shine out from amid the soot and sweat on his face. His coat he doffed long ago; one sleeve of his shirt is gone, baring a long dry arm, down which nerves, thick as a finger, twist snake-like between tufts of white hair.

"What about Aphrodis?"

"Where's Gondran?"

"'T's all right, don't be frettin'; I left 'em on the slope of Ruisseau Neuf. Fire's out up there. I come back to fetch up coffee an' brandy an' bread an' all. If ye've still some leavin's of omelette, ye can be wrappin' it up for me in a bit of paper; put a bit of ham in, too. Fire's caught by Les Ubacs now. Mortal bad, that be—plumb in the path o' the wind. I seen it as I come up; what with the smoke an' all, I didn't know where I war. Look sharp, I'm goin' back up yonder. . . .

“No, not a bottle: where d’ye want me to put ’un? How can I carry ’un in my hand all the way up yonder? Fill up the jug, for me, so, put the lid of the saucepan on it, it just fits. Don’t ye go out: ye can’t tell where ye’re goin’ in the hills, it’s catchin’ fire on all sides. Stay there, the lot of ye, together. Gondran or myself will be comin’ back this evenin’.”

He bends over Marguerite, and asks softly:

“What about Father? Didn’t he say nought?”

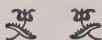
The fine, ruddy moon of her face rises: good, round, blue eyes, blue as holes in the foliage, with nothing behind them:

“No. Why?”

As he is on the point of leaving, trussed up in straps, laden with bags, his jug and basket in his hand, he stops short:

“Have ye a scissors handy, Ulalie? Here, cut

this off for me," he says, pointing to the half of his moustache which is intact. "It gets in my way!"



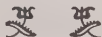
By the watering-place, he meets Gagou.

"Hey, rascal, come here!"

The other moves forward, shuffling obliquely, like a dog coming up to the whip.

"Eh, but don't ye be afraid, by God, by God. Here, ye can be carryin' this for me."

He passes him the jug and they are off.



So Gagou pants along gleefully in the wake of Jaume's great steps and advances within the anger of the high hills. The two men follow the valley along the flank of the hill. Everywhere about them

the smoke rolls and crackles; they can make out the places along which they walk only within a radius of fifty yards around and six feet above their heads, no more. Beyond this, all is lost in smoke.

Fast as they press forward, a bush surges from amid the mist, moves forward, passes and is lost. Sometimes a crazed bird falls in a swoop, skims the ground, gathers its strength to plunge anew into the black, flowing river that has swamped the sky. Jaume keeps an eye on the idiot:

“Heh, Gagou, don’t go down there . . . bad down there . . . follow me . . . here. . . .”

He points directly behind him; Gagou tamely comes back, follows his traces. Suddenly, blade-like, a great sheet of flame cuts the smoke on the left. A pine struggles, cracks, writhes, crashes to earth amid an explosion of sparks. A thin tongue of flame spurts in the dry grasses.

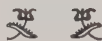
"Heh, Gagou . . . now, my lad, a bit of an effort . . . up we go!"

They tackle the hill slant-wise; three steps upward and they are lost in smoke, swallowed up. Jaume reaches behind him, catches Gagou's arm on the fly, and tugs:

"On ye come, lad."

There is a hellish odor of charred wood; the fir-apples crackle and burst. Is it . . . can it be burning ahead of them?

A great hare—then another—hard as a rock, brushes through Jaume's legs; a moment later, he hears their shrieks, below, as they strike the sharp edge of the flame.



Maurras stands on the hill, alone, alone beside a tall, stout gleaming pine. The tree, ruffling its

dense green plumage, sings. The trunk bends in the usual bed of the wind, then, with an effort, raises its red arms, tosses its glorious foliage to heavenward and stands there, rooted. It sings, mysteriously, in a low voice.

Maurras scans the pine, looks at the smoke pouring in from the bushes below. Then the thing happens, utterly without forethought, instinctive:

“Not that ’un,” Maurras says to himself. “That ’un, she won’t have!”

And he begins to cut down around it.



At once, below, Earth burst with fury. For a moment, the bushes defended themselves, cursing; then the flame soared over them, grinding them to ashes under her blue feet. She danced on, shouting with glee; but, even as she danced, she edged cun-

ningly with little soft steps toward the junipers, yonder, and they did not even put up a fight. In less than no time she had them flat on their backs; they were still howling when she reached level, open ground and was bounding away over the grasses.

Now she is the dancer no longer. She is naked; her scarlet muscles writhe, twist; her heavy, wrathful breath burns out a fiery hole in the heavens. Under her feet, the bones of the rock land crack.

Maurras hews right and left, before him and behind; then he leaps up, returns to the attack.

Suddenly Maurras and the flame meet face to face, each dancing afoul of the other, jostling and heading him off, backing up only to rush in upon his enemy and claw at him, swearing. . . .

“The punk! . . . the God-forsaken punk of a . . .”

From the corner of his eye, Maurras watches the stalwart pine. But the enemy fights with cunning. Crouching down on bended legs, of a sudden the flame springs up as though to leave earth forever; through her narrowing body, Maurras catches sight of the whole hill, burned; now she pounces on the pine, disembowels it.

"Barstard!" Maurras bellows, jumping back into the smoke. The soil founders under his feet; he escapes, fast as his legs can carry him. Now a scorching mass covers his back; the monster's fiery snout pants after him; the flame rises over the crest of the hill. To his left, the smoke is solid, motionless, like a round stone. A shadow bounds by, coughing and spitting. Two oaths.

"That yerself, Jaume?"

"Hi there, is it burnin' up yer way?"

"Everythin's afire. Hurry: there's only the Bournes passage clear."

This means that Jaume will have to run at least half a mile through the twisting detours of the narrow valley. That is no joking matter. Jaume throws his basket away, makes certain the brandy is still in his pocket and plunges forward. No sooner off, than he stops short:

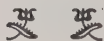
“Gagou, Gagou . . .” he shouts.

The pine, above there, falls amid a miracle of sparks.

“Gagou . . .”

A huge wall of smoke crumbles and comes hurtling down upon him. Well, it can't be helped! Anyhow, Gagou must have slipped through somehow.

Jaume breaks into the powerful trot of a hunter.



As he emerges from the land of smoke, he sees three men running over the clear carpet of the rockland.

One of them is Maurras, surely: a single glance—that way he has of throwing his feet sidewise—suffices. The two others? Jaume hopes that Gagou is one of them. But no—those are Arbaud and Gondran. As he draws near, the mere sound of their voices betrays them. Their eyelashes are singed, their faces crimson; they pant for breath; their linen steams, smells scorched. The cuffs of Arbaud's trousers are fringed with a smouldering border that gnaws away at the material, thread by thread.

“Nought to be done, now, eh?”

“No, we sent the lad back; too great a risk!”

The four men clamber up to the last stronghold of Les Bastides, the chain of Bournes. It is still untouched, but the flames have begun to nibble at

its foot. As they look down from its crest, the expanse of the burned wood stretches out far and wide. It is a vast carpet of black, aglitter with live embers, spreading forward to the outskirts of a village they had never been able to see from here because of the tall trees. Now it shines like a bare bone. So much for one side. On the other, everything is serene, smiling, lined from end to end with fields and olive groves. The valley looks like the imprint of a breast in the grass; in the middle of it, rises Les Bastides, and, close to the houses, a small white dot, moving: Babette, perhaps, or Ulalie? . . . Madelon? . . . Marguerite? . . . Or, more simply, Arbaud's youngest daughter, playing in the little square. . . .

The fire rises. The four men stand by, watching.

Below, the woods are already crackling. A blade of wind cuts through between the walls of Lure, cleaving the smoke; the flames boil like angry wa-

ters. The sky is filled with a pelting rain of flaming pine-needles; the crackling flight of the cones streaks the smoke with a line of blood. A great cloud of birds flies upward, sheer to the acrid heights of the air, grows drunk with pure wind, sinks down, soars on high, swoops through the smoke amid a whirlwind of cries. The awful breath of the brazier tears off entire wings, whirls them, bleeding, through the air like dead leaves. A torrent of smoke spurts up, crushes the sky, swerves for a moment in the wind, trembling, then, swelling its sluggish muscles, resists, spreads out. Within its flesh, the birds, shrivelled in the agony of death. . . .

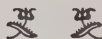
Jaume trembles from head to foot. As though to dispel an evil dream, Maurras looks away from the valley; his glance goes towards Jaume, palps Jaume's face, searches for hope in his wrinkles, in the folds under his eyes, about his mouth.

“What about yer moustache?”

“Pooh!” Jaume says, with a gesture that signifies:

“It’s the same power killin’ us, ourselves and Earth! My moustache? There it is . . . the flame. . . .”

Below, the child plays on in the little square at Les Bastides.



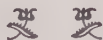
When Gagou loosed his hold of Jaume, he ran wild, plunged madly through the smoke. He belled, like a crazed stag; a mortal fear possessed him. Then, of a sudden, struck with wonder, he stopped dead in his tracks, atremble with

joy. A long thread of slobber trickled from his lips.

The heavy curtain is rent apart, ten juniper trees blaze away together before his eyes. It is soon over, the flame leaps on. But now he sees ten glittering candelabra of gold. Not a bough but is so many fiery coals . . . and the branches, too, the twigs, the whole delicate network of wood. They still stand, straight as ever, like living trees; but instead of lifeless, black bark, they are alive with worms of fire that twist, coil, writhe, winding in and out with a faint, sharp crackle. How pretty it is!

“Ga, gou. . . .”

He draws near, stretching his hand out and, in spite of the vice of fire crushing down his feet, he moves into the land of the myriad candelabra of gold.



The women never expected such a turn of events. That fire was far away, and now, suddenly, the men rush in and:

“Make haste! Hang wet sheets at the windows. . . . Look sharp! Indoors with ye, all of ye!”

Then they went to work like madmen digging up the ground in front of the houses. Arbaud mowed down the dried grass, hacked at the felt of the forsaken wheat with great furious blows of his scythe, without balance, as though drunk or insane. Babette weeps; Marguerite snivels, choking back her tears. Ulalie alone has disobeyed orders: she came out and joined the men; now she is by their side, cutting into earth and trees with her hedge-bill to clear the ground in front of Les Bastides.

Jaume has a hundred arms. No doubt the gray, viscid air disfigures an image; for Jaume appears

enormous, agile, like a lizard before the world was. He is everywhere at the same time, striking away with his pick, running here and there, bawling out words that are incomprehensible yet grateful to hear none the less.

“There’s a lad for ye!” Maurras thinks.

Ah, but if he struggles so furiously, it is because the wretched devil feels the stirring of fear deep in his bowels. Lost in his desperate activity, he can forget.

As long as he was away from Les Bastides, it was the fire he struggled against. Fire—a natural thing.

But as he reached Les Bastides a few moments ago, the first object to meet his gaze was Jadet’s window, then Jadet’s bed, and in that bed, the white hump which is Jadet’s body. Immediately, Jaume understood that the root of the matter, its

pith, the hub of the implacable wheel, was that little heap of flesh and bones—Jadet.

In a flash, Jaume saw the life of Earth tossing about him in a leaping of hares, a scurrying of rabbits, in flights of birds. Under his feet, Earth exudes beasts; grasshoppers jump, clicking; hordes of the wasps hum. There, on the tip of that old vinestalk, a green mantis spreads itself out and darts its great sawlike rostrum towards the flame. A dungchafer, frantic, gasps against a stump; rivers of worms writhe under the grasses. The knowing beasts flee. . . .

“We’ll be all alone soon. We’ve the whole hill risin’ against us, the giant body of the hill; it’s the hill, curved like a yoke, ready to crush our heads . . . I see it now, I see it. And I know why I’ve been frightened ever since mornin’. Ah Jadet, ye barstard, ye’ve had yer own way.”

He starts back in anger, draws himself up:

“What about ourselves, then? Don’t we stand for nought?”

Jaume seizes his flail. His fist grips the wooden handle as in a vice; strength flows down his arms in small, sharp, pointed waves. A vast world of bubbles tingles, explodes in his flesh. He treads on flame; under his feet, the grass burns.

“I’ve got ye at last, ye punk, ye . . .”

He beats the hill with his great flail. All about him, the flames retreat; only a black smoking patch remains wherever the boxwood bludgeon has fallen.

“Ye punk . . . ye bitch . . .”

The blows come crashing down; it is as though the hill, flouted and thrashed, must at last be vanquished.

“Jaume! Jaume!”

Maurras runs after him, seizes him by the shoulders, shakes him as though to bring him back to his senses:

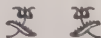
“Are ye mad . . . ? Can’t ye see . . . ?”



Maurras came in the nick of time. The treacherous flame was turning around the wrestler; a little further and it would have swallowed him in its huge jaw with teeth of gold.

With a jump, Jaume breaks clear:

“Light the counter-fire!”



Ah, that friendly flame, rising, gathering vol-

ume, speeding away! It leaps forward from their feet, hugging the ground like a warrior, crouched for a spring. There it speeds, crushing the foe in its arms, laying him low, choking him . . .

But now, huddled in a clinch, they return over the same ground, howling. A terrible roar shakes the heavens. The monster earth arises; its huge limbs of granite whistle in the very heart of the heavens.

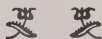
Maurras throws aside his pick; he passes by at the run. Arbaud's scythe rings, as he throws it over the stones. A door bangs; windows clatter, panes smash to fragments. In the midst of the turmoil, the cries of women:

“Father, father! . . .”

The foliage of the great oak crackles.

This is the end, then? The very universe is crumbling? Jaume's legs collapse, his head wobbles, he sinks!

“Barstard!” he roars as he falls, pummeling the hill with his fists.



In truth, Jaume believed himself dead; rocks of brimstone and cypress-branches swam before his vision.

He lay stretched out on his back, breathless; the air, eluding his lips, ranged like a wall before him. All the cells of flesh, in which life generates, rocked on the spent waves of his blood. Great eddies whirled back dead sea-fruit. Jaume saw his wife hanging by the skylight of the barn, a triangle, dead white, planted in the winy flesh of her face; he saw his daughter, tiny, so tiny, and her lips moving as she called his name for the first time. Then

clouds of smoke rolled in upon him, suffocating, and he thought: "This is the end!"



At a stroke, silence, daylight. Jaume found himself living. At first, he could not be certain; the initial sensation was of death, but of a death that had barely changed him. Immediately after, he knew himself safe and sound. Rising to his feet, he saw Les Bastides standing before him, untouched. The oak was reddish, seared; the roofing of the smaller barn smouldered and went out of itself.

One glance, and Jaume realizes what has happened. The counter-fire, eddying under the weight of the huge flames, leaped over the bare earth and swept upon the farms; but the main stream,

deflected nevertheless, now bears to the left.

Ulalie runs across the little square where a swamp of smoke slumbers. Her head and shoulders loom up out of it:

“No hurt, father?”

“No, daughter,”

Maurras, laughing from ear to ear, cries:

“It’s workin’ down towards Pierrevert. No danger now . . .”

“Let ’un do its damnedest,” Arbaud says. “Nought but stones there; let ’un do as it likes, we’re safe.”

Marguerite comes out from Les Monges. She wears a red jacket with white dots, discolored, under the arms, by sweat. With her flat feet and her heavy, fur-lined slippers, she walks as though lifting her legs out of a sea of mud. She advances, behind an odor of hot oil.

"I'm just done makin' a bacon omelette," she says.



They all ate together at Gondran's. All unbuttoned their garments.

". . . Tell ye, mate, I had the wind up, I did: 'twar catchin' here and catchin' there, blisterin' under the bloody feet of me . . ."

"I war scratchin' an' scratchin' myself; then 'twar my shirt scorchin' my back . . ."

"A red-hot cone in the mug . . . crash, bang, apoppin' like rifle-shots. Ay, a pine cone hit me in the mug . . . close to the eye, here!"

They relate all this amid a great milling of arms

and such a banging of fists on the table that the very glasses jump. Arbaud embraces Babette; he leaves a black mark on brow and cheeks. He wishes at all hazards to take a glass of wine and a biscuit to Marie, who lies spread out on her mattress. From under the covers, she stretches forth a wrist, thin as a thread; the spider-legs of her fingers pressed the glass, tremulous.

“It can’t do her no harm today.”

Today is a day of gold. Never was wine so good, nor omelette, nor tobacco.

“Ye’re a prime cook,” Gondran says, complimenting Marguerite with a smack on the buttocks.

“Ye’re too good for a blastard inn!”

Amid this joy, Jaume alone sulks. A shadowy, thick bar lines his brow. Admittedly, like the rest, he feels the fragrant, warm caress of life grazing his skin, but anxiety still rankles deep in the bitterness of his heart.

Before entering, he looked at Les Bastides, saw it unscathed, just as usual, four houses huddling under an oak. But the fields . . .

They fought. They won. Still, the havoc the enemy wrought is dire indeed. From where he sits, Jaume can see Jadet's bed and Jadet, like the trunk of a tree, under the sheets. A moment ago, he tried to give Jadet a drink and the old man played dead. When Marguerite insisted, he turned his head away sharply. Now he had just opened his eyes; his glance flashes upon the men, bright and hard as a knife.



Jaume muses:

“Well, we won. . . . Ay, we won: things are all

right. We'll be seein' later what it cost us; it cost us a great price, I fear, a cruel great price. . . . But we won. And we're all here, safe and sound. And yet—well, we're all here because it gave over in the nick of time. A shade more and we'd have perished in it. Ten minutes and I'd be dead and Les Bastides burned to a cinder. 'Twar a close call. . . .

“All in all, 'twar another setback, like the spring, like the quarrel with Maurras, like that cursed thing about Ulalie that's been fastened on my brain ever since, and like Marie's illness, too. . . .

“This time, we won, ay, but 'twar a deal closer. And we left some hair behind, too! Ay, we won again this time! But what about next time?

“The hill: it's still there, the hill! And Jadet—Jadet's still there, too! We're teeterin' . . . hangin' by a thread . . . If the hill war to smack us a smart 'un, right now— . . . It'll always be

standin' there, over us, with its great power of evil. The hill can't vanish, ye can't beat 'un once and for all. This time we won; but tomorrow, it's the hill will be winnin'. And it's only a matter of time. What've we managed, when all's said and done? We'll have endured a spell longer, no more.

"This time it missed us, missed us by a hair's breadth, but it did miss. Tomorrow, it'll be fallin' on the heads of us, grindin' us to dust. Who knows if it'll even wait till tomorrow? Maybe it's already workin' to gather the strength in its limbs to wipe us out at a blow, for good and all, before ever we've had time to drink up this coffee, here, on the table.

"There's nought to do about it. The hill ought to forget; then we could all live together just as we've always been livin': good friends and good neighbors and neither molestin' the other. But as long as Jadet's alive—the barstard! 'E's the one did

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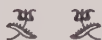
this. 'E did this with his brain! Things went smoothly afore: it never did nor said nought against us. 'Twar a good hill—knew fine songs—used to hum like a fat wasp. It didn't mind our touchin' it; we never went very deep, a dig or two of the spade, what's the harm? We went over it with no fear in our hearts. When it spoke to us, it war like a spring. It spoke in its cool springs, in its pines. Then Jadet had to come between.

“ 'E had to learn that friggin' secret to order the hill about, to keep it at his beck and call, to rile it at will. It had to be that barstard who knew. There's not a straw of life in 'un and 'e works evil. 'E's not willin' to pass on alone; wants the lot of us to go with 'un—women, trees, chickens, goats, mules, the whole multitude, like a king . . . Ay, it's certain sure 'e wants the lot of us to pass on across when himself passes. Him, with a life thinner'n a thread!

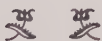
“Well—we mustn’t leave ’un time to do it!”



“Hand me yer cup,” Marguerite says as she comes forward with the coffee-pot.



“I won’t leave ’un time,” Jaume thinks, his brain afire.



After the coffee, brandy. The flask Jaume car-

ried in his pocket all morning stands on the table. Gondran jests as he pours out the brandy.

“If that war milk, it’s butter ye’d be havin’ now.”

A blessed silence falls over them. Someone knocks out a pipe against the table. The hour is flowery as an April field.

Suddenly Jadet sits up. They look at him. He seems embarrassed. Babette dare no longer dip her sugar in her brandy.

“Well, mates, we’d best be goin’ out. I’ve somethin’ to tell ye, somethin’ serious.”

They can tell from Jaume’s expression that here is indeed a serious matter. Under his beard (when was it he last shaved?) his cheeks are white as wax tapers.

“All right, we’re comin’ along.”

They start up, worried, heavy. It is not easy to

forsake blithely the blossoms that made the hour fragrant.

“Let’s be goin’ to the oak-tree; the women needn’t be hearin’ everythin’. We’ll be tellin’ them no more’n we care to, no more’n we must.”

“Is somethin’ amiss?” Gondran asks.

“It’s this amiss,” says Jaume pointing beyond Les Bastides at the earth that lies naked, battered, black, streaked with fumaroles.

“Let’s be sittin’ down; it’ll not take long. I didn’t want to be tellin’ ye about it in there for several reasons: first of all, the women, then for another reason that ye’ll grasp anon. I’ve been thinkin’ about it a good long time now, off-hand like, with out knowin’ quite what was up. Now I do know and I’m goin’ to tell ye. But afore I do that—seein’ that what I’m about to tell ye’s a serious matter, serious for me and for yerselves, too, accordin’ to

which of ye will agree and which not—before I do that, I want to know if ye trust me. I mean to say: if ye believe that when I ask ye somethin' I'm askin' it because it's right an' for all our good?"

Jaume looked chiefly at Maurras.

"Ay, I believe that," Maurras says with obvious sincerity.

"Ye never did no one harm," the others say.

Jaume turns paler and paler.

"I never did no one harm, that's certain. I've made mistakes like everybody else, but that's no fault of mine. This time I'm makin' no mistake. I'm sure of what I'm tellin' ye; remember that, I'm certain sure of it. I've no need to talk to ye of what we gone through last night and this mornin'; when I say we got off by the skin of our teeth, ye'll agree, eh? But—er—don't ye believe that this fire's another of them tricks of foul play have happened hereabouts lately."

“How do ye mean?”

“Ay, ye remember well enough. We war all right a few months gone: things war runnin’ smooth, the wheat comin’ up all right and ourselves gettin’ along comfortable ’tween hogshead, jug and saltin’ tub. I’d already had a word or two with the jobber from Pertuis way about my beans and the price ’e offered war a good ’un. Things war workin’ out all right.

“Well, then, suddenly it begun! If I remember rightly, it begun the day Gondran come to tell us Jadet war out of his head. We went to yer house, we listened to ’un; it struck me mighty queer. The rest of ye thought it queer too, if ye remember; we even discussed it that evenin’ as we left the house. Then there war the business of Gondran, with his olive grove, come out of the depths of the earth. Things looked a bit worse by that time. Then the cat come. Well, after that—the spring, little

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Marie, the fire. The spring, we war able to cope with; the child—well, doesn't look to be goin' worse, eh, Arbaud? But it's not goin' any better, neither. As for the fire—hm, we don't know yet.

"When I seen the cat, I didn't keep it dark: I told ye: watch the hills; but, truth to tell, I never thought things would go so ill. And I pondered carefully: after the fountain, and the child's takin' ill, and the fire, if some new curse strike us, what're we to do?"

"But how? What? What do ye mean?"

"It's a nasty jolt we had!"

"Ay, surely! But it's . . ."

"Truth to tell, if somethin', some trick like that we just encountered war to fall on us some one of these days, we'd perish. That's my opinion."

"Mine, too," Arbaud puts in.

"And here's the worst of it: if them war all natural happenin's, it'd be all right: ye can't al-

ways be sufferin' misfortunes, the tide must turn some day. But, look ye: shall I tell ye? All them things war done against us, against ourselves'n our families, against Les Bastides. And they war done by someone who's stronger'n ourselves, too."

"Who?"

Jaume looks at Gondran:

"Jadet," he says slowly.

"Ay, he's a barstard, the old man, quite true, that!" Maurras says.

Gondran does not open his mouth.

"If I say Jadet, it's because I know it, it's because I'm certain sure of it. I'm not the kind of man would do another harm without reason. Remember: all I've said, all I'm about to say, are things I'm certain sure of; I've sought proofs, I've pondered everythin' in my heart, I'm certain sure of it."

Gondran coughs.

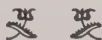
“What makes ye say ye’re sure of it,” he breathes, “I don’t mistrust ye, mind; I’ve faith in ye. But—how do ye *know*? Tell me, so I can see if that’s what I’ve been thinkin’ myself?”

“Mark ye: when the spring died, after we’d combed the brush in search of the water vein, we come back, that evenin’, at the end of our tether. I’d enough to keep me tossin’ about my bed, wrackin’ my brains . . . It seemed eerie to me that we found nought. Our land here by Lure is all riddled with water and ’twar our life blood, so it war. Struck me that behind the air and in the earth some will war workin’ counter to ours, that this will and our will war lockin’ horns like two goats and they vexed at each other. Right war on our side; we war searchin’ in all conscience, there war nought we could do else. Then why war the other so stubborn?”

“In the mornin’, I went to see Jadet. ’E’s the old-

est among us; and maybe happen 'e knew a thing or two might have proved useful. 'E did: 'e boasted of it, but 'e wouldn't tell. When I failed to make Marie well, I took it upon myself to seek Jadet out and speak to 'un once again. It warn't willingly I done it, I can tell ye; for 'e'd already sent me packin', with foul words, to boot. This time, 'e showed himself up. Ye can't have the faintest inklin' of the things 'e told me. And I seen the evil of 'un, standin' stark before my eyes, like a man. 'E told me we'd all die, the lot of us, and 'e glad of it, and doin' all that war needful to that end. I tried to make 'un listen to reason, I grew angry, but I could do nought with 'un. That war when he set to talkin' like 'e war the fount of mystery. It all rose before the eyes of me: a whole world born of his speech. With his words, 'e raised countries and continents, hills, rivers, trees and beasts; his words, as they fell from the lips of 'un, raised

the dust of all the world. It danced like a wheel, turnin' and spinnin' round and round; I war all dazzled by it. Suddenly I seen clearly the entirety of earths and skies, of the earth we live in, but altered, furbished up and greased, all slippery with wickedness and evil. There where once I seen a tree or a hill—such things as ye're usually seein'—there war still a tree and a hill, but I seen through the terrible soul of 'em. Power in the brown folds of the earth and hatred wellin' up in the green brooks of the sap, hatred throbbin' in the wounds of the furrows. And then I seen some-one with a thorn in his hand, tearin' at the scars to make anger rise up."



They listen, their eyes rounding. Agape, with hanging lip and wide eye, their hands motionless,

they are overwhelmed, wholly, by the apparition of the harpies of the grasses.

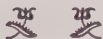


"I seen the hill move," Gondran murmurs.

"And it's Jadet holds the thorn," Jaume concludes. The sweat trickles down over his white forehead.

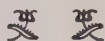
"The barstard!" Arbaud says.

"Lucky yerself is here," Maurras says.



A silence falls. Since the fire, the silence is more leaden than before; the trees no longer hold it

aloft over man, it bears down on the earth with all its weight. Then, from the heart of the black moor, rises the howling of a dog.



“Well?”

“Well, it’s Jadet, no doubt on that head.”

“Jadet?”

Gondran bites his hand, that enormous hand which avails nothing in this crisis. At last he removes it from before his mouth to allow his thought to find vent.

“That’s so, ay, ye’re right. I didn’t say nought, but I’d understood it. Not the way ye say it yer-

self, for ye're cleverer'n us. But I'd a suspicion of it. Ye're right: the thing come from Jadet. But there's nought to be done about it."

"There be."

"What?"

Under Jaume's lip, a tooth flashes, quite yellow; it disappears: "

"We must kill 'un!" he says.

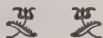
Such a notion does not penetrate into their minds at one stroke.

"God's name!" Arbaud says, when it dawns upon him.

Now that the huge, overpowering thing has come out, Jaume breathes more comfortably. He has suddenly turned crimson; great veins press down on his temples like the roots of an oak tree. He speaks in a dead voice which barely crosses his lips, then girds him about: he stands there in the

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very heart of his words, the embodiment of his idea, like a wooden saint wrapped in his cloak.



“We must kill ’un; it’s the only way. He’s maybe busy now contrivin’ the thing that’s to kill us. We’ve to make up our minds whether we wish to live, to save Babette, the girls, Les Bastides. That’s all there is left us to defend ourselves. We’ve struggled against the body of the hill; we must crush its head. So long as its head remains, we’ll walk in the shadow of death!”

“’E’s a man,” Gondran says.

“’E’s no man,” Jaume says. “A man? Yerself’s a man and myself, and the rest of us; we hold life in honor. We stand before life like when we’re bearin’ a tiny lantern in the teeth of the wind; we

shelter it with our hands, we stand in fear of it. It's often happened ye've taken wee chicks in yer hand, wee warm chicks that just fit in the hollow of yer palm. When they're there, settin' right between yer fingers, if ye war to squeeze a mite, ye'd crush 'em. We've never felt the faintest wish to do this, because we're men. As for himself, it's no wee chicks 'e holds in the palm of his hand, it's ourselves; and we've already felt 'un squeezin' his fingers and we know 'e's meanin' to squeeze to the end. Jadet's no man."

"I'll not gainsay ye, not I," Gondran resumes softly, "I know it; I've not lived beside 'un five-and-twenty years without knowin' 'un. I hold with yerself: all this come from Jadet . . . and we should kill 'un, just as ye say, if we wish to go safe. But 'e's only a very thin thread of breath in 'un; maybe we'd not be havin' to wait very long, 'twould happen of itself. . . ."

“And if ye wait,” Jaume barks, “if ye wait, ’e’ll be doin’ ye harm so long’s there’s a drop of life left in ’un. The nearer ’e’ll be to the end, the wickeder ’e’ll grow. Long and short of it is, if we wait, we’ll all of us pass over to yonder side on the same day, Jadet first, and ourselves after ’un, like a procession of penitents. What risk does ’e run?”

“Ye’re right,” Gondran says. “What I myself says, that’s on the head of his bein’ my father-in-law, ye understand. And then maybe we ought to be tellin’ Marguerite of it.”

“Go fetch her; we must settle the matter this evenin’.”



Gondran disappears into Les Monges. Jaume looks at Arbaud and Maurras.

"We might as well be orderin' the business once and for all," he says.

The others answer resolutely, in one voice.

"Ay, that's certain!" and then, "Have done with it!"



With Marguerite, it was soon over. As Gondran went into Les Monges, the three men suddenly felt afraid of Marguerite. Already they saw her flying over the grasses, her nails bared, her mouth filled with shrieks. Jaume had prepared everything against her:

"I'll tell her: 'Eh, but then are ye wishin' all this here to turn to wild grass again?' "

No, with Marguerite, no argument was neces-
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sary, it was soon over. She came out slowly, reluctantly, crushing the earth heavily; she stands there now, crouched against the watering-place, weeping.



They moved away from her to conclude the business.

"Yerself's the only one can do it," Jaume says to Gondran. "'E'll not suspect ye."

"How shall I do it?"

"With yer hands. In his condition it won't need much."

"Here's the place," says Maurras, pointing to his neck. "I was regimental-butcher in the Army, I know. Right here, like with rabbits. A sharp smack, then ye bury his face in the pillow."

"Show me," Gondran says.

"Right there, with the side of yer hand."

"Will 'e bleed?"

"No, not if ye strike 'un clean. Maybe a drop, but don't look: put his pillow over 'un and press on it for a moment."

A silence; the four men are motionless. On the spur of the moment, Gondran makes up his mind; one step—the hardest—and he moves off, sheer, his back rounded, his arms stiff, his hands held far from his body, as though he feared they might stain his trousers. With each step, he seems to be making sure the earth under him is solid.

Through the gray evening, a vulture of Lure passes, its talons bared.



A cry. The door bangs. Then Babette rushes out, her neckerchief falling to the ground.

“’E’s dead. Jadet’s dead. Come in. Quick!”

Old Madelon appears on the terrace. Gently, without great emotion, she motions them to come in.

Gondran was just about to enter Les Monges. He leaps backward to get clear of the door, to establish definitely that he is in no way responsible for this, that he had not gone in, that Jadet died a natural, a quite natural death.

Babette stands yonder under the oak-tree, explaining, by means of gestures which bring her top-knot falling down. She holds it up in her hand all the time she is speaking, and suddenly Gondran finds himself deeply moved by the arch of her fair lifted arms. Life flows back upon him in a vast, roaring wave. His ears are filled with music;

he sits down heavily on the ground, like a man drunk.



It is true: Jadet is dead.

They doff their hats. Jaume laid his pipe on the sideboard; as it still smokes a little, he goes to knock it out against the front door, muffling the noise. Marguerite gulps down her brief, tearless sobs.

“Ye must dress ’un while ’e’s still warm, Marguerite, ’e’ll be too stiff, after. Give us his Sunday coat.”

To allow Gondran and Maurras to pass him the velvet trousers, Jaume takes the body in his arms,

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holding it at the armpits; Jadet's flabby head falls back on Jaume's shoulder.

They lay him out on the bed, fasten his jaw with a white scarf.

"Close the shutters, Marguerite. Light a candle. We'll watch up by 'un, the men. As for the women, ye'd best be goin' to bed."



Gondran fumbles in a drawer of the wardrobe. He is looking for a pipe.

"Have ye any tobacco left?" he asks Arbaud.

Night fell, a dense, dark night. In the distance, over by Manosque, the fire still burns on, feebly. A cricket sings on the terrace.

Gondran, astride a chair, his eyes closed, sucks softly on his pipe.

And Jadet's gaze is still fastened on the Post Office calendar.



They sat there smoking, without exchanging a word, until about eleven o'clock at night; then, just as the last stroke of the tall clock rang, Jaume raised his hand:

"Hark!" he said.

Outside, in the depths of the shadows, a noise. Deep in their hearts they wondered: was it the wind? or rain, perhaps? But their temples froze. They moved over to the door, opened it, pricked up their ears. And the same thought came to all of them. . . .

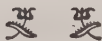
"Take yer lantern!"

They went out. Even at that moment, doubt was no longer possible. But they wished to make sure, with eye and hand.

The spring flows.

Maurras gazes at the door of Les Monges, through which the glaucous light of the funeral candles streams out. He touches Jaume's arm.

"Eh," he says, "it war five minutes to the hour!"



They waited the conventional twenty-four hours and, this evening, buried Jadet on the edge of the land spared by the fire. Maurras made the coffin; and it was Babette who read a passage out of her prayer book over the hole. As they came back, Gondran told Jaume:

“Ye’ve to be goin’ to Manosque tomorrow to attend to the formalities. Monsieur Vincent will make out a certificate for ye; then ye can go to the Mayor. . . .”



“I’ll go, but tomorrow afternoon; I’ll go down to Les Palines and take the stage from Banon. What do ye say to it, Ulalie?”

They went back home. Ulalie, a prey to some mysterious agitation, walks around the table, stares at the window, heavy with night and stars.

“Do as ye please!”

Nevertheless, Jaume is up as early as six o’clock. It is no small matter to go to Manosque. A man must take out his best clothes, unfold them, dust

off the naphtha, look for a neckerchief, brush his hat, polish his boots, shave. . . .

As Jaume makes the soap froth with the fine clear water of the fountain, he is thinking of that morning, not long since, when he found Gondran shaving in wine. Now, there are eight feet of rich earth in a fine mound over Jadet, and once again the spring is flowing. It was five minutes to the hour, just as Maurras said. Jaume has had all he can bear, he is weary; he has grown thin, haggard. He thinks of flowers, of fields of hay in flower, of the cries of women as they turn the hay.

“Ho, Jaume,” Arbaud shouts from below.

Jaume is not yet thoroughly mended: he trembled at the other’s call. But when he opened the window, he saw, behind the oak, the little mound of fresh earth, a man’s length.

“Well?”

"I've come from the Bournes valley. There's a dead man yonder: must be Gagou."

Ah, no one had given Gagou a thought these last two days.

"'E's all shrivelled up like a small grasshopper. I'm pretty sure it's himself; I'd a bit of a look at the face of 'un. Rats have eaten away his nose; I could tell 'un by his great tooth. I'm off to tell Gondran."

Gagou! So all is not ended, then. That thing still lingers in Jaume's brain; those words of Jadet's, which are not dead. Well, since cruel bitterness there must be, best settle that straightway, too, best suffer a bit, and then know.

Jaume resumes his shaving. Ulalie comes in, carrying the jug. And, as he continues to rub the soap over his face:

"Look ye, Ulalie, Arbaud's just come up . . .

he found Gagou dead. . . . Burned to a cinder, down there, Bournes way. Rats've eaten his nose away."

"I know. I heard."

She places the jug under the sink. Jaume watches her in the looking-glass as he continues to rub his brush over his thick, heavy beard.

"Where did ye say 'e war?"

"At Bourne."

Ulalie moves over to the corner where the tools are; she rummages among the hardware and takes out the new spade. Jaume follows her every gesture in the glass. She feels the sharp side of the spade, then goes to the door. Jaume turns. He tries to turn slowly; he tries to speak easily, but it is a hollow voice comes out from the soap-lather:

"Where are ye goin'?"

"Where you said 'e war," Ulalie says once more.

They look each other squarely in the eye, and

Ulalie's features relax, almost imperceptibly. A wrinkle hollows the corner of her mouth, one eyelid flickers . . . very softly, she shuts the door behind her, goes down.



Then it was true?

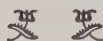
Jadet lies under eight feet of earth with rot caking his mouth already, but the words his lips sowed sprout like evil weeds.

“Ah, ye must be laughin’ to yerself, ye old barstard! ye got me after all. Now what with this thing, I’ve enough rue to chew and chew on for the rest of my born days.”

Suddenly he is filled with the blessed desire of abandoning himself, of throwing himself on the

winds of destiny as on a squall which clings to the back, sweeps a man headlong.

A spell of repose, repose and white door-sills where a man may drink in the sunlight, smoke his pipe . . .



Ulalie comes back.

Jaume is quite ready. He is clean-shaven; a white cotton scarf, knotted loosely around his neck, reveals his Adam's apple, reddish and pointed. His velvet coat has kept its folds of the wardrobe; on the chair beside him, his light, wide-brimmed felt hat and his stick.

She comes back. It is about twelve-thirty.

Before entering the house, she scraped her spade

carefully with a little flat stone to clean the earth off it. Her father sits alone at the table, with a plateful of ham and a bottle of wine before him. Ulalie goes to the tool corner . . . lays down the spade . . . wipes her hands on her apron . . . turns around . . .

She looks just as usual, save that her lower lip protrudes, covers the upper lip so as to efface completely the thin slit of her mouth.

“No soup?” Jaume asks.

“No, I hadn’t time.”

She sits down by the table, her hands on her knees, without uttering a word.

“Ye’re not eatin’.”

“I’ve no hunger.”

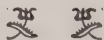
Painfully, she swallows a thick saliva. A heavy dream weighs in her head. And, suddenly, after a long silence, she says in a thin plaintive voice, as though speaking to herself:

“What about myself? What shall I be doin’ now?”

Jaume looks at her: his daughter, the mite who toddled under the apple-trees in her white bonnet. She is ugly, to be sure; but deep under her reddened eyelids, her eyes shine like broken coal. And yet, she is right. Must she work all her life, then, without ever tasting the joys a woman inherits?

It is time to go. Jaume rises:

“Ulalie,” he says, “look ye: we might take on a lad from the Orphan Asylum. A lad of sixteen. They’re grown men, ye know, and ye can lead ’em any way ye will?”



Jaume and Gondran sit on the edge of the fountain. They are drinking absinthe. The bottle dances

in the cool waters of the trough. It is dusk, the season of cold stars.

"Fine, our water, eh?"

The shadow of Lure covers half the earth. From the houses come a clatter of dishes, a child's lullaby.

"Aphrodis is sendin' his girl to Pertuis, to her grandmother's, for a change of air."

"Looks as though things war goin' better with her."

"Ay, like with everythin' else."



"Look ye, we're keepin' the cat, ye know. Come from Les Grandes Bastides, so it did. Ye remember Chabassut brought me a cartload of straw; seems

the cat war lyin' in it. A good little beastie; ye should see 'un go after the rats. . . ."

"Aren't ye startin' to plow yet?"

"Tomorrow."

The sharp odor of water-cress rises, vaporous, from the brooks the spring fills. The fountain chants a long melopoea which speaks of cold stones and shadows. The living trough quivers. Suddenly Jaume bends low, lays his glass down on the grass.

"Look," he says in a low voice.

On the slope, over by the desert, a black shape moves. A wild boar.

"Ah, the son of a ——!"

Already Jaume has seized his gun, pressed it to his shoulder. He covers the beast twice, coolly, with the will to destroy. The shot rends the familiar sounds of spring and houses.

"Got 'un, got 'un."

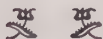
"Oh, oh!" Arbaud shouts from the fields.

“Ho!” Maurras cries from the olive-grove.

All four run towards the beast which stamps and writhes, kicking up clumps of earth about it.

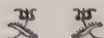
It is a fat young boar, shaggy as a chestnut. The buckshot gutted it; the blood gurgles down its thighs. It tries to rise on its paws; it howls, discovering its great white rooting tusks.

And Maurras, it is, who finishes it off as he strikes it with his hedge-bill.



They skinned it while it was still warm, shared its meat by the handful. Then the men washed their hands in the clear water of the trough. Jaime kept the skin for himself. He stretched it out on

two sticks of willow and hung it on the low branch of the oak for the dew to soften.



Now, it is night. The light has just gone out at the last window. A great star watches over Lure.

From the skin, which turns in the night wind and throbs like a dream, tears of black blood fall over the grass.

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